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THE SHADOW OF THE MINE

AND OTHER PLAYS OF THE COAL FIELDS

THE SHADOW OF THE MINE

And Other Plays of the Coal Fields

BY

LEO B. PRIDE

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To My
FATHER AND MOTHER

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The action of all these plays takes place in the vicinity of the coal fields of southern Illinois.

The time is of the present.

"Foursquare," under the title of "Without Christian Burial," was awarded first prize of $1,000 in a playwriting contest sponsored by the Graham-Page Legion, Detroit, 1929. The Judges were Zoë Akins, Norman Bel-Geddes, and Grover H. Whalen.

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THE SHADOW OF THE MINE

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CHARACTERS

ELENORA
ADONELLA

THE SHADOW OF THE MINE

SCENE—*The sitting room of a miner's cottage in the coal fields of southern Illinois. An iron cot is pushed against the wall on the right under a small window. In the rear, center, is a door. There is a window on either side. In the left wall, forward, is a door which opens into another room. This door is closed, as if locked up forever.*

The murky light from the heavy day outside seeps through the dingy windows and penetrates the room with its lurid gloom. The room has no color, no life, no spirit. The walls are not papered, the bare boards not even painted.

It is about four o'clock in the afternoon in winter. An electric bulb, strung from the center of the ceiling overhead, sheds a circle of yellow light upon the uncarpeted floor. The light also falls on ELENORA, *an Italian peasant woman, who sits motionless before the small stove. In years she might be fifty; in experience she may have lived a dozen lives.*

The stillness of the room and the silence without is broken by the sound of distant hammering somewhere down the muddy street. ELENORA *moves slowly to the window in the rear, right, and stands for a moment*

looking out. The hammering seems at once distant and yet near, like a rain of bullets upon a dry roof. There is an intense silence. ELENORA *returns to the stove with a puzzled expression on her face. She looks into the coffee pot, hesitates, glances round the room, and finally sits down. The scarlet shawl falls to her shoulders and reveals her white hair. Footsteps are heard on the porch and a moment later the door opens.*

ELENORA. Adonella?

ADONELLA. Yes, mother.

ADONELLA *comes in and closes the door quietly. She is a young woman of twenty-three or four, plain and simply dressed, but not without beauty. She carries an old world market basket which she places on the table. Then she goes to the windows and carefully closes the curtains.*]

ELENORA. I thought something had happened to you.

ADONELLA. The mud is ankle deep.

ELENORA. What kept you, dear?

ADONELLA. I had to wait in line at the store.

ELENORA. What did they say?

ADONELLA. Nothing.

ELENORA. Tell me, now.

ADONELLA. [*Worried.*] Nothing, mother.

ELENORA. The food, is it the last?

ADONELLA. [*After a pause—with difficulty.*] Yes. The store closes tonight. The old men say the mine will never work again. It was the worst disaster in years.

ELENORA. We have little to eat.
[*The distant hammering is heard.*]

ADONELLA. The store, mother, closes tonight.

ELENORA. Can't they understand?

ADONELLA. No.

ELENORA. Did you tell them again that your brothers and your father were killed in the mine, that it is their mother and widow who lives in number twelve?

ADONELLA. How I have tried to make them understand! They said they paid when there is work in the mine, but could not pay and support wives without work. [*There is a pause.*] The mine has closed forever.

ELENORA. Adonella, we are alone.

ADONELLA. I told them we were alone. Yesterday I went to the manager of the store. "You can drive us out this way," I said. "We have given everything to the mine."

ELENORA. What did he say?

ADONELLA. [*Seeming to speak to herself.*] We close

tonight. [*The hammering sounds nearer.* ELENORA *goes to the window.*] Don't watch them.

ELENORA. What are the men doing?

ADONELLA. Boarding up the windows. [*She moves to the window.*]

ELENORA. Why?

ADONELLA. The families are moving away.

ELENORA. It is well they have a place to go.

ADONELLA. Their men folks are gone, and there is nothing in the camp.

ELENORA. [*As* ADONELLA *leads her back to the chair.*] Men folks!

ADONELLA. Don't now.

ELENORA. [*Hovering before the stove.*] It is so still. Every one must have moved away.

ADONELLA. Don't worry, mother.
[*There is a pause, and again the hammering is heard.*]

ELENORA. [*Turning to the window.*] They are boarding up the windows of *all* the houses.

ADONELLA. You know they put up the notices a month ago.

ELENORA. I could not read them.

ADONELLA. I told you that the mine would close down.

ELENORA. You did not say they would put us out.

ADONELLA. I was not sure. I know now. [*A pause.*] No work, so we must get out.

ELENORA. Adonella, we have no place to go.

ADONELLA. That is what I told them at the store. "We have no money," I said. "We have only the clothes on our backs."

ELENORA. If your brothers were here, and your father, we would ask nothing.

ADONELLA. And we would be proud and happy. [*She pours coffee.*] Drink it now. You have eaten nothing in two days.

ELENORA. I want neither food nor drink, Adonella. [ADONELLA *holds the cup for a moment; finally* ELENORA *takes it and drinks. The room is hushed in silence. The hammering begins again, becoming nearer and louder. They turn to the windows.*]

ADONELLA. Don't think of it.

ELENORA. Your brothers were strong and unafraid, and your father, the men said, took cheer into the darkness.

ADONELLA. Please!

ELENORA. And now—no work, no brothers, no husband!

ADONELLA. Mother!

ELENORA. It was a great mistake, Adonella, the day we came to the mine.

ADONELLA. [*Standing beside her.*] We must be brave, as they were brave.

ELENORA. God bless you. You are the last. It is the third time you have been called back.

ADONELLA. I belong here, now.

ELENORA. Your brothers loved you, dear, and your father said that some day you would sing. That is what we lived for.

ADONELLA. You have all been good.

ELENORA. I don't want you to give up.

ADONELLA. They gave everything for me.

ELENORA. [*Grieving.*] Oh, Madonna mia, we are forgotten.

ADONELLA. We are not forgotten, mother. We have had hard blows, one after the other, but we are not forgotten.

ELENORA. Hard blows, one after the other. First Paolo,

then Gaetano, then your father. [*After a pause.*] The mine can do no more to me.

ADONELLA. We must have hope.

ELENORA. When you were doing your best, each time you were called back.

ADONELLA. It was the wish of Paolo that I go on. Then Gaetano would have me try again to sing.

ELENORA. And your father, the thing he longed for most in the world was that you would sing.
[ADONELLA *remains caressing the tired old face of* ELENORA. *A pause. Then the sound of the hammering draws nearer.* ADONELLA *moves toward the window, turns and comes back to the stove.*]

ADONELLA. How I wanted to repay them. How I wanted to repay them! [*A pause.*] Some day we will go back to our sunny land, where the sun is still shining on scarlet poppies.

ELENORA. If your brothers and your father were here . . .

ADONELLA. Mother, do the burdens of the heart bring anything but sorrow?

ELENORA. What is there to cling to, Adonella?

ADONELLA. We are taking darkness into darkness. We should take light.

ELENORA. I have prayed that God spare me your father. He has not done so. I am broken. Now my heart cries out in pain that God will give me strength to work with my hands, that you may go on.

ADONELLA. I have strength.

ELENORA. This new land has not been kind to us.

ADONELLA. We must put the new land behind us, and forget the mine.

ELENORA. You don't understand, Adonella. We toiled a life time in the fields of the old country to come to this new land. Our hopes were in God. I was an old woman before we crossed the water.

ADONELLA. I wonder if it were best?

ELENORA. You were but a child.

ADONELLA. But I remember . . . how I remember going into the fields one day, and working, as if my soft hands could help. The southern sun was going down, and the weary world seemed at rest. We walked along together—Paolo, Gaetano, and father and I. You were behind. I heard the larks singing, and I saw the scarlet poppies. You looked back, and I knew that you were crying. Somehow, I knew that we were going far away. [*There is a pause. Then her face is transformed as the pictures flash through her mind.*] The black hole in the ship . . . the long voyage . . . the

skyline . . . the big statue . . . then a thousand eyes staring at the new land. [*There is another pause.*] Herded into a big building like cattle . . . a long wait . . . the long ride on the train at night . . . and then this awful place. [*As if awakening from a terrible dream.*] But it seems always to have been like this—gray days without light, only our dreams.

ELENORA. You remember well, Adonella.

ADONELLA. We will go back.

ELENORA. I cannot.

ADONELLA. We must, mother, far away where the sun is still shining . . . where we will pick round fruit and listen to the song of the lark.

ELENORA. I will travel no more. [*The hammering is very near.*]

ADONELLA. Mother? Nothing is left here.

ELENORA. Everything . . . your brothers, your father. I cannot go. I am old, Adonella, and I can be of no good to you.

ADONELLA. [*After a pause, watching the kind old face of* ELENORA, *silent and still.*] In the big city, where Paolo and Gaetano and father sent me to study, I sang every day, and at night learned to make a living.

ELENORA. What are you saying, Adonella?

ADONELLA. You forget that even I have been too long in America not to have learned the ways of this new land. Your bambino has learned to make her own way. My hands are young and firm and strong. I can work a writing machine . . . I write the English in funny little signs . . . I speak and translate my own language well, and there will be work for me.

ELENORA. Surely God cannot deny you work.

ADONELLA. At night I will go to the teachers.

ELENORA. You must go alone, Adonella. [*The hammering sounds again.*]

ADONELLA. Mother, you must get ready now. We must leave.

ELENORA. I cannot go. It would be worse than leaving the old country to live by the mine, where men are swallowed in a black hole, and carried out so misshapen and ugly that a mother cannot know her own sons.

ADONELLA. It is the curse of the mine.

ELENORA. First I thought, when Paolo was killed, and the word came that he lay with the black coal on his fair face, I could not bear to stay.

ADONELLA. We should have gone then.

ELENORA. But the mine gave us work. [*A pause.*]

Then Gaetano was killed, and I knew that I must leave the mine.

ADONELLA. It was a mistake to stay.

ELENORA. A second time you were called back, and yet a third. Now your father, he, too, must be crushed, and I cannot think of going away. They are all gone now, and I will stay near them.

ADONELLA. Mother!

ELENORA. I will never leave.

ADONELLA. You don't know what you are saying.

ELENORA. Three times have I waited at the mouth of the mine, and three times I have seen my men folks carried out of the underground darkness. [*She slowly shakes her head.*] Now the joy of packing full dinner pails is gone forever, and there is left only a plain stick to mark their heads, which once lay upon clean pillows. [ADONELLA *looks at her, thinking intensely. There is a long pause. The sound of the hammering is close by.*]

ADONELLA. [*Turns to the window, hesitates, returns and tries to persuade* ELENORA *to get up.*] Do you hear the hammers? Do you know what that means? [ELENORA *slowly turns to the windows.*] No work . . . nothing . . . starvation. . . .

ELENORA. [*Remaining firmly seated in her chair.*] I know. But I will never leave this house.

ADONELLA. [*Seeming to realize the strength of her determination,* ADONELLA *becomes visibly frightened, and only stares at* ELENORA. *Finally she takes hold of her—pleadingly.*] You can't sit here like this. Do you hear? Get up!

ELENORA. [*Shaking her head.*] Let me alone, Adonella.

ADONELLA. The store is closed . . . no one is left in the camp . . . the mine has shut down. Come, we must get our things together. [*The hammering becomes still louder.* ADONELLA *glances quickly at the windows, then goes to the cot on the right, jerks off the blanket, spreads it on the floor and puts the few odd pictures and things in it.*]

ELENORA. [*Going to the window and listening.*] They are still boarding up the windows. [*She tries to smile.*] Let them come.

ADONELLA. [*Going to the window and taking her by the arm.*] They are right across the street. [*She goes quickly into the room on the left, forward. Finally* ELENORA *sits down and stares at the wall before her.*

ADONELLA *returns with clothes.*] Hurry, I tell you. It is not much we have, not any more than the handful when we left the old country.

ELENORA. [*Glancing at* ADONELLA.] Is it Paolo and Gaetano's clothes you have there, and your father's red sash? [*The hammering has suddenly stopped.*]

ADONELLA. Yes. And Gaetano's accordion, and father's big pipe, the one he would smoke in the evening.

ELENORA. [*Rising and taking the things quickly.*] Then give them to me. [*There is a little struggle; finally* ADONELLA *lets her take the things. A pause. Then the sound of lumber being dropped on the ground outside the windows.*]

ADONELLA. [*She has suddenly glanced at the two windows, where two workmen are standing dimly outlined against the dingy curtains. She tries to lift her mother out of the chair.*] Get up! Get up!

ELENORA. [ELENORA *holds the clothes to her breast.*] Let me stay. I cannot go. [*There is a pause. She stares at the wall before her, then the tired, grief-stricken face of* ELENORA *brightens with a spiritual smile. She speaks quietly, as if to herself, her voice heavy with the agony of sorrow.*] I see them, Adonella—Paolo and Gaetano and your father. We are at home. Father is telling of your future, dreaming of the day when you will sing. [*She caresses the clothes.*] "Nothing else matters," he is saying, "only that our Adonella will sing." [*There is a pause.* ADONELLA, *held for a moment by the loving smile and beauty of* ELENORA, *is awakened as from vivid dream by the sound of boards that are thrown against the windows. The room grows slowly darker.*]

ADONELLA. [*Going to her.*] Mother? You must come

now. [*She stands looking down at her.*] Don't you hear me? It is Adonella, mother, she is talking to you. Can't you understand? [*They face each other.*] If nothing else matters, then why don't you come? Paolo and Gaetano would have me go back. Father always wanted me to sing. Don't you understand? [*Her eyes welling up with tears, her voice tremulous.*] Please, for their sake, come! [*Kneels before* ELENORA.] If you love them, if you love me, you must come! Please! You can't stay any longer now. Mother? Mother! [*The men begin to nail the boards on the windows.* ADONELLA *rises and stands motionless for a moment.*]

ELENORA. [*Slowly turning and looking round the room.*] If we could only live in this house where your brothers and your father slept. [*She looks at the door at the left with a loving smile.*]

ADONELLA. Are you coming?

ELENORA. [*After a pause.*] Yes, we must go now, and may the Virgin help me. It is for you that I go, and for Paolo and Gaetano and your father. [ADONELLA *takes up the bundle and the basket. They move slowly to the door in the rear.*]

ADONELLA. The black cinder road leads to the East, and we must be brave. I will sing, mother, in the streets if I must, but to God.

ELENORA. [*Unable to turn her back on the room. She*

comes forward to the door on the left and opens it quietly, stands looking into the room. She closes the door softly and looks at the Shrine on the wall. She speaks in a grieved whisper.] Madonna mia! [*Kneels.*] Madonna mia! If the mine ever opens again, be kind to the next family that moves in. Spare them the pain that was born in this house. [*A great silence falls on the room.* ADONELLA, *waiting at the door in the rear, comes forward and takes the image of the Virgin from the wall. Then* ELENORA *rises and they go out quietly. The men continue to nail the boards on the windows as*

[THE CURTAIN FALLS.]

FOURSQUARE

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CHARACTERS

JOHN, *the carpenter*
ROY, *the apprentice*
CHARLIE
OSCAR
THE CASHIER

FOURSQUARE

SCENE: JOHN *the carpenter's workshop in the mining village of Vinegar Hill, in the coal fields of southern Illinois. On the right is a work bench with tools hanging on the wall. There is a window forward. On the left there is also a work bench. In the rear, center, a door opens into the shop. Pine boards are stacked against the wall. In the center of the room, forward, a long wooden box rests on two wooden trestles. Shavings and scraps of lumber are scattered on the floor.* JOHN, *an old man with white hair and beard, is jointing a board at his bench on the right. He is dressed in faded threadbare overalls and blue shirt. He works quietly, patiently, pausing from time to time to place his square on the jointed board.* ROY, *a young man of twenty, is fitting a lid to the box. He works impatiently, fretting, then he throws down his hammer and stares at his work. The old man looks at him. It is about noon on a warm summer day.*

ROY. I can't do it, paw.

JOHN. Yes, you can, son.

ROY. It don't fit like it ought to.

JOHN. In all things be patient. Learn to do the small things well, even to drive a nail. Then the bigger things will not be hard, my boy.

ROY. But I'm wasting lumber, and I can't make a good job of it.

JOHN. You might as well learn now as any time.

ROY. But, Sam, he ought to have a better box than any I can make.

JOHN. Sam ain't partic'lar. I often hear'd him say, "Just put me away in any old box."

ROY. I wonder why Sam was always like that? He never cared much about nothing.

JOHN. Sam never had much to care about. Just a kind of kicked dog.

ROY. He wasn't a bad man.

JOHN. No, his own worst enemy, as the sayin' goes. I reckon I knowed Sam as well as any man. He'd come to my shop, durin' off-days at the mine, an' sit here an' talk. I liked the man.

ROY. He didn't have to drink himself to death.

JOHN. He didn't have to. He just did.

ROY. He liked you, paw. I used to see him on the street o' nights, in his pit clothes. He wasn't never too tight to ask about you.

JOHN. I liked Sam, an' he liked ever'body, somehow. He was queer that way. Most people took him for a joke. A lonely fellow, he was, without a friend in the world. [*There is a pause.*] I used to tell your mother. "There's a man that'll straighten up, if they let him alone."

ROY. He was a good worker, wasn't he?

JOHN 'Tis said he could load more coal than any man in Vinegar Hill. He wasn't afraid of work, an' I guess he couldn't of been a bad sort.

ROY. Wonder why he drank all the time?

JOHN. That was Sam's business. I don't know. Never belittle yourself by pryin' into another man's life, son. Always tend to your own, do what you think is right, an' you'll never bring reproach on yourself or others. That is what a man must live by.

ROY. I don't understand Sam at all. Don't anybody know what made him act so?

JOHN. Nobody. As many times as he come to my shop, he never told me, an' I never asked. He told me once, though, that a man what had been through his lot, needed somethin' to steady him.

ROY. Didn't he have no people, no family, nothing?

JOHN. We don't know. He married a woman when he came to Vinegar Hill. 'Tis said he wasn't happy.

ROY. He started going to church, didn't he?

JOHN. That was quite a spell back. The new preacher didn't understand him right. So Sam says to me once, "Why should I pay for bein' called a drunkard? Don't I know it?

ROY. People ought to've let him alone.

JOHN. People are that way. [*He looks out the window, then glances at his watch.*] You gettin' hungry?

ROY. A little. [*Goes to the window.*] I wonder why Uncle Charlie don't come with the cheese and crackers?

JOHN. He's on the committee. Him an' Oscar is tryin' to raise enough money for the funeral.

ROY. I wonder how much they got?

JOHN. They had fifty-seven dollars yesterday at four o'clock. It takes nigh on seventy-five.

ROY. [*Returns to the coffin.*] That don't pay you, does it, paw?

JOHN. I ain't askin' nothin' for my time, not for Sam.

ROY. This is the fourth coffin you've built for nothing. Don't the lumber cost money?

JOHN. Money is not ever'thing. There's many a thing that money can't buy.

ROY. For instance, now?

JOHN. A man's friendship, his honesty, his loyalty to men, an' all things a man ought to live by. Don't think too much of money, an' you won't have to worry.

ROY. Paw, you've been saying that all your life. Now, you're an old man, and you haven't got a suit of clothes to your name. It sounds all right, but it don't work out.

JOHN. My boy, I have lived three times longer than you. Yes, I am an old man. I've travelled the world around an' I've seen more than you. I've never thought of money. I hope you will listen to me, an' grow up to be a fine man, respected by your fellows. Don't think too much of money.

ROY. But how can I get what I want without money—education, success? [*Pause.*] Paw, you belong to the horse and mule age. I'm living in the automobile and airplane age.

JOHN. Some things never change.

ROY. It's money that counts now.

JOHN. A little integrity is better than any career. [*There is a pause.*]

ROY. It all sounds good. You've given your time and your lumber, and you don't even get thanked for it. I'm not saying anything against what you're doing for Sam, only you always been like that.

JOHN. I'm usin' the lumber I bought to build mother a

new kitchen. The time don't amount to much. Somebody's got to think of people like Sam.

ROY. Well, maybe so. [*He sighs heavily.*] Maw said before she died that she guessed she'd have to do without the new kitchen awhile. [*He looks out the window.*] There's Uncle Charlie coming now. I wonder what he's looking so down in the mouth about? [*There is a pause.* CHARLIE *and* OSCAR *come in.* CHARLIE *carries a tin bucket and* OSCAR *has a paper sack in his hand.*]

CHARLIE. Hello, Roy? Hello, John?

ROY. Hello, Uncle Charlie?

CHARLIE. It's sure hard, beggin' money to bury a man with. [*He draws out a bandana and mops his face.*]

OSCAR. [*Looking over the coffin.*] A right strong box you're makin' for Sam.

ROY. Oh, I guess so.

JOHN. What's in the bucket, Charlie?

CHARLIE. The saloon keeper sent it, John. A little beer to wet your stomach. [*He places the bucket on the coffin.*]

JOHN. Now there's a man for you. It's sure hot, ain't it? [*He drinks.*] Whew!

ROY. Did you have much luck—the money?

CHARLIE. Guess who give five dollars?

JOHN. I don't know.

CHARLIE. The saloon keeper.

OSCAR. Sam'd appreciate that.

ROY. Did you get the seventy-five yet?

CHARLIE. Nearly. Who do you think give ten?

ROY. Ten dollars? That's a lot of money.

CHARLIE. Nobody but Sam's wife.

JOHN. That was thoughtful of her.

OSCAR. [*Placing the sack on the coffin.*] The old whore. Little she ever done to help Sam, when he was alive, an' drinkin' all the rotten whiskey in the county.

CHARLIE. [*Drawing up a nail keg and sitting down.*] I ain't found the whiskey in this county so bad.

OSCAR. You wouldn't. [*He makes a sandwich.*] Little anybody ever done to help Sam.

JOHN. I got him up out of the gutter more'n once, an' walked him home. There ain't a man in the camp, I guess, what ain't done the same thing by him.

OSCAR. Who, I'd like to know. [*There is a pause.*] John, you look after that no-count drunkard like he was your own boy.

CHARLIE. An' Sam'd been dead long ago, if John

hadn't took him in his own house that time he got down sick, him without a penny in the world.

OSCAR. If I had a silver dollar for every kind thing you done for Sam, I could pay my grocery bill.

JOHN. His own worst enemy, Sam was.

OSCAR. Charlie, tell John about that man who give the dollar for the funeral.

CHARLIE. [*Referring to a little book.*] It was the man at the bank, the cashier. He was in the saloon, tryin' to find out somethin' about Sam. Had a letter or somethin' in his hand.

JOHN. [*Eagerly.*] The cashier of the bank, askin' about Sam?

CHARLIE. Yes, that's the man. He was askin' a lot of questions.

JOHN. That's funny.

OSCAR. [*Eating.*] He was awful interested, with all them papers.

JOHN. Do you reckon Sam owed money or somethin' at the bank, that we'll have to pay?

CHARLIE. I don't have the least idee, John. I think somethin's wrong.

ROY. Paw, did you help Sam get money, or anything, at the bank? See, that's what comes of taking a bum in.

JOHN. I went on a little note for him once. Oh, I don't think Sam done nothin' wrong. He would of played square with me.

ROY. I bet you got yourself in a lot of trouble. Paw, did you ever loan him money?

JOHN. I give him a check for five dollars a few times, when he was down an' out.

ROY. See, what if he doctored the checks? You'll have to make it good. Now, see what comes of your high talk?

CHARLIE. I hope you ain't got yourself in trouble, John.

JOHN. If I have, I'll make it good to my dyin' day. I trusted Sam. I still believe in him. He was a man. He may of been his own worst enemy, but he was my friend. I know Sam wouldn't beat me. No, he wouldn't do that!

OSCAR. [*After a pause.*] It sure looks tough.

JOHN. Did you find out, boys, what the cashier wanted?

CHARLIE. He looked awful serious, John, like a banker. Him an' the saloon keeper talked a long time.

OSCAR. The saloon keeper told him where you could be found, John, here at the shop.

JOHN. I'll be here, if he wants to see me. I'll make it good.

ROY. It's too bad, too bad, and Sam had to go and die in the gutter.

OSCAR. He must a-hit his head on the sidewalk, 'cause when we lifted him up, the blood stuck, an' pulled the skin off his face.

ROY. Wonder what Kennobia thinks of Sam dying drunk, so sudden like?

CHARLIE. She didn't say. I met her on the sidewalk, dressed to kill, an' kinda hurryin' like.

JOHN. Struttin' like a town turkey, I guess. That was the way she done when she married Sam.

OSCAR. Married Sam? The old hussy was livin' with him.

CHARLIE. That's bad, bad. [*He drinks.*]

OSCAR. When did she marry this new feller?

CHARLIE. Last night. Father Flemming married 'em.

ROY. She was the reason, I bet, for Sam getting churched.

JOHN. Churched?

ROY. Didn't the parson throw him right out of the church, for drinking?

CHARLIE. [*Putting down the bucket.*] Oh, excommunicate, as they calls it at the other church.

JOHN. Throwed out of one, married in the other, an' all over the same woman. Well, I wish Kennobia luck. [*He drinks.*]

OSCAR. Yes, gol darn her.

CHARLIE. [*Taking the bucket.*] This beer ain't half bad. [*Passes the bucket to* OSCAR.]

OSCAR. No, it's all bad. [*He drinks.*]

JOHN. I wonder if Sam's wife is comin' to the funeral?

CHARLIE. I guess there won't be no funeral.

ROY. Why, Uncle Charlie?

CHARLIE. You explain, Oscar. You seen the parson.

OSCAR. Well, bein' as Sam once joined the church, I stopped by to pay my respects to the parson, an' to see if he'd preach the funeral.

JOHN. Is he goin' to do it?

OSCAR. "That wild imp of the devil," he spit at me, an' slammed the door in my face. Left me standin' there with my pants down, as Sam would say.

JOHN. Did you speak to Father Flemming? Maybe he might preach it.

OSCAR. I seen him, too. He was nice about it, but he said I'd better see our own parson.

CHARLIE. I reackon Sam was wild, all right.

OSCAR. Wilder'n a new colt in cold weather.

CHARLIE. He used to do the damnest things.

JOHN. He harmed no man.

OSCAR. Only beat up his wife now an' then.

CHARLIE. I don't know but what he was right. If she'd a-been a woman of mine, I'd a-drownded her long ago.

OSCAR. That might a-helped her some.

JOHN. [*After a pause.*] So Sam is to go without a funeral?

OSCAR. It kinda looks that way.

JOHN. Well, I guess it won't make much difference to Sam.

ROY. Was there many people up at the undertaking house?

CHARLIE. No one. But we was to meet there this afternoon, an' take him out to the graveyard.

JOHN. Ain't that the undertaker's job, preachin' funerals sometimes?

OSCAR. Yes, but there ain't no starch in what that fellow says.

CHARLIE. It'd cost more money, for a reg'lar sermon,

an' I don't feel as like I could go about beggin' more, for that no-count Sam.

ROY. The dirty thief! After all paw done, he had to go and beat him.

JOHN. We don't know yet.

ROY. [*Looks out the window.*] There comes that man from the bank. [CHARLIE *and* OSCAR *rush to the window.*]

CHARLIE. Looks madder'n a boiled owl.

OSCAR. [*Turning quickly to* JOHN.] Do you want to slip off to the house? What'll we tell him, John?

JOHN. [*Straightens with dignity.*] I'll run from no man. If Sam beat me, I'll make good.

ROY. Bah! I'll not listen to your high talk any more. I'm ashamed of you, paw. [*There is a pause.*]

JOHN. [*Takes out a blue bandana and blows his nose.*] Don't rub it in. I thought I was doin' what is right. [*There is a long pause. The man from the bank steps into the carpenter shop.*]

THE CASHIER. Good morning?

JOHN. Good mornin'.

THE CASHIER. Are you John, John the carpenter?

JOHN. Yes, yes, sir.

THE CASHIER. John, I have some business to wind up with you.

JOHN. So I hear. What is it?

THE CASHIER. [*Taking papers from his pocket.*] It's about Sam.

JOHN. [*A bit nervous.*] I'm sorry. Just give me a little time.

THE CASHIER. Take your time. Will you sign right here? [*Hands him pen.*]

JOHN. It's upset me. I didn't think Sam would do this to me. [*He sits down on the nail keg and laboriously writes his name. He looks at the* CASHIER *appealingly, his face working.*] You'll give me plenty of time, won't you? I'll pay the money back!

THE CASHIER. [*Looks at him.*] I don't understand, John. Why, man, what's the matter? You're rich. Sam has left you a fortune.

JOHN. [*Steadies himself against the coffin.*] What did you say? [CHARLIE *pushes him the bucket.*]

THE CASHIER. That fellow Sam, why, he had a fortune in the bank. He left it all to you, to John the carpenter. Here's the will.

CHARLIE. [*Thumps the bucket.*] Here, John. [JOHN *drinks.*]

THE CASHIER. I guess you won't have to worry now.

JOHN. It must be a mistake. I didn't know Sam had a penny in the world.

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THE CASHIER. Nor any one else. There is no mistake. Sam left this letter and the will at the bank about three months ago, to be opened when he died. It was just after he got down sick. There's twenty-one thousand dollars in the bank in your name.

JOHN. [*Takes another drink from the bucket.*] I'm sweatin' like a nigger, somehow.

THE CASHIER. What have you got there, boys? [JOHN *passes him the bucket. The* CASHIER *drinks.*] Not half bad. Well, so long, boys. [*He goes to the door.*] Drop in at the bank, John. [*He goes out.*]

JOHN. Thank you.

CHARLIE. [*After a pause.*] Well, I'll be damn!

ROY. Sam was sure a good fellow.

OSCAR. He was certainly a good spender.

CHARLIE. Sam was all right.

JOHN. Sam . . . is . . . dead. [*A hush settles over the room.*]

OSCAR. It don't seem right, somehow, Sam bein' put in the ground without a Christian burial.

CHARLIE. It seems like there ought to be flowers an' everythin' nice, when a man has to leave this world.

ROY. There's a patch of goldenrods in the meadow back of the mine.

JOHN. All right, wild flowers for Sam.

ROY. Paw, couldn't you do something for Sam? You can pray pretty good, and talk. I've heard you do it.

CHARLIE. What about it, John? I guess we can scrape up a little somethin' for you.

JOHN. Don't think of me. Only I never preached a sermon before, an' I wouldn't feel as like I could do it right.

OSCAR. There won't be nobody there, except us four, an' the saloon keeper, maybe.

CHARLIE. If you could say somethin' in your own words, John, somethin' short an' plain like.

OSCAR. Somethin' that's fittin'. If you could practise up, here, actin' like Sam was in his box.

CHARLIE. Think it over, John.

ROY. Go ahead, paw.

JOHN. [*Standing with his hands resting on the coffin.*] Someone ought to do it. [*The men remove their hats. There is a pause.*] Sam, you wasn't a bad boy, not to them who knowed you. [*He seems to search for words*

with which to continue.] It's true, brother, that you was your own worst enemy. But you harmed no man. We who worked in the mine with you, liked you a whole lot. Friend, many's the time we took you home. [*A pause.*] You was wild, but we hope things will be different now. [*There is another pause.*] So, for the last time, Sam, we are takin' you home.

[*A great hush settles over the carpenter shop. The men sit motionless, staring at the floor in silence, seemingly afraid to break the spell of the voice that has just spoken. Finally they look up slowly, and begin eating the cheese and crackers and passing round the bucket as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THE BARBARIANS

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CHARACTERS

JAKE KNOWLES
FRANK BLAKE
BARTO
SNOWBALL
PETERS

THE BARBARIANS

SCENE—*A side view of a chamber off the stub-entry in Stony Creek Coal Mine in the coal fields of southern Illinois. The chamber, or "room," as it is called, is only one of many tunnel-like openings driven into the coal. The section shows an irregular wall of coal streaked with veins of sulphur and gray patches of slate, and extends from right to left for some twelve or fifteen feet, where it is bounded by the "face" of the room, the farthest point of advance or digging. The method of mining employed is known as the "room and pillar" system of underground mining; the wall of coal in the background forming long parallel pillars of support for the roof, and the space shown being the room which serves as a haulageway for the outgoing coal and as an intake for the fresh air that must be pumped into the room for the men at work. On the floor is track on which stands, at the extreme right, a two-ton pit car loaded with coal.*

Opaque blackness pervades the scene. No living thing with eyes can see. Out of the obscure atmosphere and remote regions of the mine come the sounds of the underground industry—strange creakings, metallic noises harsh and grating, faint and distant subterra-

nean rumbles—all emanating from the black void, from which, during the momentary intervals of silence, sounds the musical tinkle of dripping water, somewhere close by.

Gradually the darkness becomes less intense; a pale and leaden light shines from the right, then a single point of light moving toward the left. A man is dimly seen. JAKE KNOWLES, *stripped to the waist, enormous, powerful, his knotty muscles crawling under his grimy skin, struggles under a huge lump of coal which he places on the pit car. He grunts, standing for a moment, panting hard. Another light is seen.* FRANK BLAKE, *slender, poorly developed, his chalky-white skin smeared with grime, struggles under a lump of coal and with effort tries to place it on the car.* KNOWLES *helps him and gives him a friendly slap on the back.*

KNOWLES. That's the boy, Frank.

FRANK. [*Breathing hard.*] I guess I haven't been much help, so far.

KNOWLES. You'll get used to it.

FRANK. Thanks, Mr. Knowles. You're considerate. I know I'm a poor buddy.

KNOWLES. That's all right. Well, suppose we eat now? It's nigh on noon. We can't load no more coal till we get more cars.

FRANK. I could eat a dog. [KNOWLES *gets his bucket*

from the right and sits down with his back to the pillar of coal. FRANK *takes a paper of sandwiches from his jumper behind the car.*]

KNOWLES. Hungry?

FRANK. I'm not used to this kind of work.

KNOWLES. What brought you down here, anyhow?

FRANK. I needed a job.

KNOWLES. [*Looking him over.*] What was you doin' before?

FRANK. I was a clerk on top. Got fired.

KNOWLES. Somebody put in your place, I reckon.

FRANK. How'd you know?

KNOWLES. That's the way them top jobs go. [*Looks at* FRANK *curiously.*] I thought you was the boy what worked in the office. Last night at the roadhouse, I says to myself, "That must be the lad who pays the boys off." Men like you don't often come down below.

FRANK. You were a good sport to take me on. I was trying to get on for a long time.

KNOWLES. My son used to work beside me, but he got caught under the slate. I needed a buddy, an' seein' as you needed a job, I didn't mind signin' up for you. You kinda look like my boy.

FRANK. I've got a real reason for coming down here. You see, I've studied mining, I'm educated, and I'm going to make these mines safe.

KNOWLES. [*After a pause—chewing his food slowly.*] I wish you luck.

FRANK. You believe me, don't you?

KNOWLES. Looks like you bit off a big bite. [*He shakes his head and eats gloomily.*]

FRANK. What's the matter?

KNOWLES. The old timers, I'm thinkin', might take you for a tenderfoot. Don't pay no attention to 'em, though.

FRANK. Everybody's got it in for me—I get so damn mad!

KNOWLES. How so? What seems to be the trouble?

FRANK. Oh, nothing much.

KNOWLES. You can tell me if you want to.

FRANK. I've got to stick it out, that's all.

KNOWLES. I've seen more'n one of them office guys come down, an' leave in a hurry. [*After a pause.*] You're worried. Been here all mornin' an' ain't said a word.

FRANK. I've got to make more money. I've got a wife and boy.

KNOWLES. We all have. [*Reflectively.*] It takes a heap of brawn to keep the tots in school. [*Looks at him.*] You're troubled, all right.

FRANK. It's killing me!

KNOWLES. Tell me. I've got a wife an' tots.

FRANK. I couldn't make a living. She got disgusted with me. . . . It got worse and worse, we quarrelled.

KNOWLES. [*Nods.*] I see.

FRANK. I got madder than a boiled owl, told her what I thought of her, left her with the boy last night.

KNOWLES. Now you'll have to go back, Frank.

FRANK. She's impossible. I kept telling her I was coming below. She didn't want me to come to the pit. You see, it was like this. The company sent me down from the Chicago office. She hates this country . . . she's been used to things, and now I can't even make a living.

KNOWLES. [*Waiting for him to continue.*] What'd she say?

FRANK. She said if I came below, I'd be like the rest of the barbarians.

KNOWLES. [*Swallowing a mouthful of food.*] Them what?

FRANK. Barbarians.

KNOWLES. [*Troubled.*] Oh. [*After a pause.*] That's somethin' like a gorilla, ain't it?

FRANK. No. They're a little higher than gorillas. I guess you'd have to know about evolution to understand. They are a race of men, I was reading, that's dumb. All backbone and no brains . . . can't think. That's how I lost my job, I was reading.

KNOWLES. [*A bit hurt.*] So your wife, she don't like you to work below. We're just common, sweaty men.

FRANK. She's been used to things. She's afraid something might happen.

KNOWLES. Don't see how anything could happen. [*Then with a blank stare on his face.*] You're got a high strung wife, boy. [*Repeating to himself.*] Barbarians . . . barbarians . . . so that's what people call us? [*He looks at* FRANK *squarely.*] Well. [*The sound of footsteps is heard approaching on the left. A moment later,* BARTO, *a short, squat Italian with enormous shoulders, comes in. He is singing a folk song. He is followed by* SNOWBALL, *a big negro. Both men are stripped to the waist, and wear heavy dungaree trousers and hob-nail shoes.* BARTO *has a radio under his arm, and his attitude toward this instrument is almost that of paternal affection.* BARTO *sits down, the radio between his legs. He opens his dinner pail, takes a newspaper from his hip pocket and begins to read si-*

lently. SNOWBALL *sits down against the car.* KNOWLES *watches them curiously. There is a pause.*]

BARTO. [*Reading his paper—chuckling.*] Huh, huh.

SNOWBALL. What are you cackling about, Napoleon?

BARTO. [*Reads.*] Da Italian Princess, da paper say, marry herself to one coal miner. Golla, I wish I was da single man.

SNOWBALL. If you was, you'd be in jail.

KNOWLES. [KNOWLES *smiles and looks them over.*] Barbarians.

SNOWBALL. [*Leaning forward, his eyes wide.*] Eh? What's that?

KNOWLES. I say, you're a barbarian.

SNOWBALL. [*Baffled.*] Ah didn't either.

KNOWLES. [*Good-naturedly.*] Now, there's Snowball . . . goes to church every Sunday. He can tell us about evolution. What's a barbarian?

SNOWBALL. [*Greatly flattered.*] Oh, Barbarian? Him's a man what did forget to evolute, says our new preacher.

KNOWLES. [*Dryly.*] All backbone an' no brains. [*He turns to* BARTO.] Barto, you're a barbarian, ain't you?

BARTO. [*He receives the question with an air of indif-*

ference and takes a string of garlic from his pail. KNOWLES *moves over and* SNOWBALL *holds his nose.*] Barbarian? I do not geeva a damn. Worka vera hard with da back and da hands. Maka da mon. Hava da wife and bigga da fam. Barbarian, maybe. Soma day, I own da American blind pig, am rich, then I leeva thees damn countree. [*He shrugs his shoulders and attacks the garlic.*]

KNOWLES. [*Looking around and chuckling.*] Barbarians all. That's a good one on us, boys. I'll have to tell my wife she's married to a barbarian. She'd like to call me that—along with other things. [*They remain silent, glancing at one another; finally their eyes become concentrated on* FRANK, *who has been sitting quietly. He moves uneasily in his seat as they appear to recognize him for the first time.*]

BARTO [*Staring at* FRANK.] Him barbarian, too? [*He shrugs.*] Huh, ees not bigga 'nough. [*There is a pause.*]

SNOWBALL. [*Looking* FRANK *over—curiously.*] You call us barbarians?

KNOWLES. [*With a kind of detached air—himself curiously amused.*] You punks make me tired. [*He rises with an impatient gesture of the hand and walks behind the pit car and leans over facing the men.*] What's the matter with you, say? [*The men seem to listen, but after the fashion of men who work at back-*

breaking toil, continue to chew their food gloomily paying little attention to KNOWLES.] That boy's all right, now. [*He chuckles, insisting upon having his joke.*] Didn't you know we was all barbarians, you and you, and you, and you. [*He points to himself.*] An' Frank, there, he's one of them things too. His wife said so. Why, think we been livin' all these years without knowin' it. We're much obliged to you, Frank. [BARTO *and* SNOWBALL *continue to stare at* FRANK, *then at* KNOWLES, *silently resenting his interpretation as a joke. There is a pause. The men eat in silence, looking at one another. The dripping water, endlessly beating a musical tattoo, sounds close by. Finally* PETERS, *a vague shadow of a man, comes in through the break-through on the left and stands for a moment looking at* FRANK. *Finally he sits down. There is a suggestion of the pig and the fox in his face. His attitude is that of a man whose presence is not wanted. Feeling this curious desire to exclude his company, he rises and faces* FRANK.]

PETERS. Well, baby, when did you get down below?

KNOWLES. This mornin' He's goin' to be my buddy.

PETERS. Tenderfoot, eh? He's that smart kid from the office. [*Stands before* FRANK *facing him with a sneer.*] How long do you think you'll last, baby?

KNOWLES. Leave him alone, Peters.

PETERS. [*Ignoring the old man.*] Take care you don't

get your soft hands dirty, kid. [*A silence falls upon the room.*]

KNOWLES. [*Casually pushes a pick over to* FRANK.] Take up for yourself, boy. [SNOWBALL *and* BARTO *stare at the old man.*]

PETERS. [*Still ignoring the old miner.*] Better go home to your maw, kid, or that doll-faced wife of your'n what hangs round the office with ye. [FRANK, *taking the pick and facing* PETERS, *gets to his feet.*]

SNOWBALL. [*Himself getting up.*] Say, what fo' you come here to start a row, Peters? What fo', I asks you? [PETERS *looks at* SNOWBALL, *grins, and then turns his back on him.*]

BARTO. [*Wanting to take part in the argument.*] Who tella you to coma in bigga Jake's room? [*He rises and faces* PETERS *with his hands on his hips.*] Leeva da small barbarian alone. [*The men gather close and finally they become engaged in a general argument.* PETERS *draws away and stands facing* FRANK.]

PETERS. Now put that pick down, baby, before I smack ye down.

KNOWLES. [*Commandingly.*] Leave him alone, Peters!

SNOWBALL. Get out o' here!

PETERS. [*Glowering at* FRANK.] You damn chalky-faced clerk!

FRANK. [*Swinging the pick over his shoulder and breaking out in a rage.*] You can go to hell, you pig-faced idiot! If you had any brains, you wouldn't be here yourself. [PETERS *rushes at him and* KNOWLES *blocks his attack.*] Who are you to tell me what to do? Anybody can do your work. [*He seems to forget for the moment that his anger has been aroused by* PETERS, *and he turns on the men in general.*] Anybody, you wops, niggers, scum of the pit! [*As this insult is flung at them,* PETERS *springs at him, to be knocked sprawling upon the floor by* KNOWLES. BARTO *and* KNOWLES, *fired into action, now start for* FRANK. KNOWLES *jerks the pick from* FRANK *and forces them back.* FRANK, *raging with anger, stands defying the men.*] You're good for the dirty work of the world and that's all! Scum of the earth! Barbarians! Barbarians!

KNOWLES. [*Trying to keep the men back.*] Cut it out! What's the matter here?

FRANK. [*Blinded by his anger, he jerks the pick from* KNOWLES.] Let 'em come. Let 'em get me if they can. I'll put a hole in their heads. [*He stands defying them, a furious expression of rage on his face.* KNOWLES, *kicking and forcing the men at their distance, protects the boy. The men become suddenly arrested in attitudes of doubt and amazement, and stand transfixed for a moment, puzzled. Finally* KNOWLES *confronts the men with a commanding stare. There is a pause. He turns to* FRANK.]

KNOWLES. [*Himself wondering how it all started.*] Don't do that.

FRANK. [*Panting breathlessly.*] Did I start it? [*Then assuming his quieter nature.*] Make 'em lay off.

PETERS. [*Stumbling to his feet and holding his stomach.*] I'll smash his weasel head in! Who the hell kicked me? [*He groans with pain.*]

KNOWLES. You touch that boy an' I'll sink this pick in your skull. [*The two glower at each other.*] Now, you sit down. [*He forces* PETERS *to sit, standing over him for a moment.*] Sit down, Snowball. You, too, Barto. [*They do so, not without a feeling of unwilful subordination. There is a pause.* KNOWLES *moves back and forth in the room, dragging the pick with him, glancing at the men. He is master of the situation, ready to quell any outburst of fresh trouble. Finally he pauses before* PETERS, *who faces him with a cynical sneer.*]

PETERS. This ain't the end of this.

KNOWLES. Dry up. [*Stares at him.*] You started this trouble. You're always ridin' somebody about somethin'. That boy's got a right here. He's got make a livin', ain't he? Now, you leave him alone or I'll have you thrown out of the mine. [*He seems to become more disgusted with* PETERS *as he faces him.*] An' by God, if they won't throw you out, I'll do it myself!

[*There is a pause. He moves quietly up and down the room.*] It's too bad grown-up men can't act like men. [*The three men accept his decision with an air of unwilful silence.* KNOWLES *sits down, the pick at his feet.*] Eat your dinner, Frank.

BARTO. [*Seems to awaken from a troubled thought.*] I think it ees da fool I am. Wasta my time on da likes of you. Soma day I leeva thees damn countree.

KNOWLES. Pipe down.

BARTO. [*With wounded dignity.*] I should not talk to da likes of you.

KNOWLES. Shut up. [KNOWLES *gives him an affected look of anger and* BARTO *looks down at the floor gloomily. The men try to eat their lunches, chewing their food slowly. Finally* BARTO *begins to tinker with the radio.*] Will the blame thing work? What d'you do with it?

BARTO. [*With a sense of wounded pride—childishly.*] It ees how I gotta da way to learna da Engleesh. I lika to spick da Engleesh. Soma day I am da American citizenship.

KNOWLES. I wish you luck, old man. [*He taps* BARTO *on the shoulder, then he takes out a pack of cards and deals himself a hand of solitaire.*] Guess I'll have a little game while my dinner settles. [*The radio begins to squawk.*]

SNOWBALL. How much that thing cost?

BARTO. Fifty dollar. American money.

KNOWLES. Sure you didn't forget your change? [*The radio squawks again.*]

PETERS. [*Rising upon his elbow.*] Turn that God damn thing off!

BARTO. Da radio hava da bad cold. [*He tinkers with the dial.*]

FRANK. [*He has risen and has been standing for a time, deep in thought.*] I guess I'm the cause of this trouble, Peters, I'm sorry. [PETERS *only stares at him, remembering the blow in the stomach.* FRANK *turns to* SNOWBALL.] Snowball, old man, it's all right. [*He turns to* BARTO.] I'm sorry, Barto, old timer. [*Finally he turns to* KNOWLES.] Mr. Knowles, I'm sorry. I lost my temper. [*He remains standing and looking at the men for a moment with an expression of regret on his face, leans against the wall and stares dully at the floor.*]

KNOWLES. [*Studying his cards.*] It's all right, Frank. [*He looks at the men.*] Now, he's told you he's sorry. Let it go at that. [*The men do not look up, apparently conscious of a kind of childish shame. They continue to eat gloomily. The musical tinkle of the dripping water beats endlessly. The wagging blazes of their carbide lamps cast a pale and sickly luminance through*

the murky atmosphere of the room, accentuating the shadows in their faces and knotty bodies.]

SNOWBALL. [*After a pause.*] It is very quiet. [*The long drawn-out bray of a mule is heard in the distance.*]

KNOWLES. Molly must be hungry.

BARTO. Niza mula, Molla. [*There is a dead silence. Out of the obscure atmosphere of the mine comes a creaking sound, like the distant whine of a wagon axle.*]

PETERS. [*After a pause, listening and looking at the radio.*] Listen, Wop, turn that thing off.

BARTO. What's the ma'? Da radio ees not on. [*The sound continues.*]

FRANK. [*Slowly lifting his head and staring at the ceiling.*] Listen to that.

KNOWLES. [*Glancing up.*] Mother earth takin' on. [*The sound continues.*]

FRANK. [*Motionless, still staring at the roof.*] That's all, mother earth.

KNOWLES. [*Trying to locate the sound.*] It ain't up there. It's farther down toward the neck. [*He jerks his thumb to the left.*] You might as well try to find Gammer Gurton's needle as locate them sounds. The old earth moanin', that's all.

FRANK. [*His eyes still fixed on the roof.*] That's all

. . . the old earth moaning. [*He remains motionless. There is a long pause. The men, conscious of a strange tone in the boy's voice, look at one another and then turn to* FRANK. *The prolonged whine, like the squeak of a wounded mouse in flight, comes down the entry and ceases with an appalling quickness in the center of the room. It pulls the men up sharp. They look at the roof. Finally* KNOWLES *turns to* FRANK.]

KNOWLES. [*Curiously looking at* FRANK.] Are you afraid? The way you talk, you'd almost scare a fellow.

FRANK. I'm not afraid. Let her groan. [*He continues to stare at the roof, as if he were held by a spell. The men glance at one another.*] Groan, groan, groan.

SNOWBALL. [*Quietly to* BARTO.] There's something the matter with the lad, maybe?

KNOWLES. [*Finally getting to his feet and taking* FRANK *by the arm.*] Listen here. What's the matter? There ain't nothin' to be afraid of. It's nothin' but a little noise, a little settlin' somewheres.

FRANK. [*After a pause, hesitatingly.*] Oh, I'm not afraid. What's needed here is teamwork, teamwork against this grand old mother earth you're dreaming about. Why don't you get together against the gases she vomits at you instead of fighting among yourselves? [*There is a pause. The men look at him with a curious kind of admiration.*] That's all. Teamwork! So that you

can be sure you're going to walk out of the mine instead of being carried out on stretchers.

KNOWLES. [*Seeming to weigh* FRANK'S *words with understanding. He turns to the men.*] Did you know that Frank, here, has been away to them big schools studyin' minin' an' engineerin'? [*The creaking sound begins again. After a pause.*] An' did you know that he's come back to make these mines safe? [*For a moment there is silence, then* PETERS *bursts forth with laughter; then* BARTO *and* SNOWBALL, *seeming slowly to realize the incongruity of the idea, begin to chuckle.*]

BARTO. [*Putting the lid on his bucket and getting up. He waves* KNOWLES *aside.*] Always you cracka da joke, bigga Jake. I am go home on that one. [*He starts to go.*]

KNOWLES. I don't see nothin' funny to laugh at. [SNOWBALL *and* PETERS *rise and start off left.*] Well, might as well call it a day, with no more cars to load.

SNOWBALL. The mine blowed over. There's no work this afternoon. Everybody's went home. [*They all start off left. The sound of sharp cracking breaks the silence.* KNOWLES *stops suddenly and* FRANK *cowers beside him. There is a subterranean rumble, a ponderous roar, stupendous cracking, the deafening tumult of falling rock, the tearing sound of timbers being smashed and riven, tremendous concussions and prolonged thunder. The men instinctively drop to the floor and put out their carbide lights. Save for the bright*

glare of the bug lights (electric) on the caps of KNOWLES *and* FRANK, *the room is in ink-black darkness. From the left comes a rayless puff of coal dust. There is a long silence, broken only by the musical tinkle of dripping water.*]

BARTO. Wat ees?

KNOWLES. Lay low.

SNOWBALL. A light.

KNOWLES. My flashlight. [*He flashes on a light and plays it around the room.*]

FRANK. Do you smell anything?

SNOWBALL. [*Quietly.*] Afterdamp, big Jake.

PETERS. [*Excitedly.*] Gas! Afterdamp! Afterdamp!

KNOWLES. [*In a commanding voice.*] Quiet now! Stop that nonsense. Don't be a fool. How do you know we're caught yet? Pull yourselves together.

FRANK. [*In a quiet, though somewhat tremulous tone.*] I think the gas is coming in. I can smell it.

KNOWLES. Steady now. Hug the floor till we get our bearin's. [*He coughs, and immediately the coughing is followed by the others, as if by imitation.*]

FRANK. Hadn't we better get together?

KNOWLES. Listen, men. It's teamwork that's needed

now. [*He plays the light around the room and into the faces of the men, then he goes over to the left and passes through the break-through.*] I'll see if I can find out anything. [*The men can be heard and dimly seen getting to their feet.*]

BARTO. [*Speaking for the first time, his voice somewhere in the dark.*] By golla, I leeva thees damn countree.

SNOWBALL. You been sayin' that ten year.

FRANK. You never know when a thing like this will happen.

PETERS. [*Grumbling.*] What're you cryin' about? Why don't somebody do somethin'? There's gas I tell you!

KNOWLES. [*Appearing on the left and throwing the light in* PETER'S *face.*] Now you keep quiet. [*There is a pause. The dripping water beats endlessly.*] Steady, men. [*The men stand motionless, waiting for him to speak.*]

PETERS. For God's sake, what is it?

KNOWLES. The explosion's off this room, in the entry. We're blocked. Steady now. We've got to build a protectin' wall against the afterdamp. [*There is a rush and a general skirmish.*] Take your time. Take your time. [*A pause.*] All right, let's go to work. First, Barto, you take a pick an' go down an' kill the mule. We'll

be needin' all the air we can get. Any old blinker can breathe four times as much air as a man. Get along, Barto. [BARTO *takes the pick and hurries off to the left.*

KNOWLES *plays the light on the pit car.*] Push the car over here, boys. [*He withdraws to the left, indicating a place for the car near the break-through.*] Unload her, boys. We'll build the wall here. [*He plays the light on the wall and the floor.*] BARTO *and* SNOWBALL *obeying quietly, begin to unload the car.*]

FRANK. [*Waiting his turn for directions.*] Where do you want me, Mr. Knowles?

KNOWLES. Here, you hold the light. [*He passes the flashlight to* FRANK, *then turns to* PETERS.] Peters, put them buckets under the drip. Make slime. Fetch it quickly. [PETERS *goes to work without a word.* BARTO *returns from the left and throws down the pick.*]

BARTO. Molla, da mule, she die.

KNOWLES. Work with me, Barto. We'll lay the wall. [*They get to their knees and begin placing the lumps of coal on the floor in a row at right angles to the wall of coal in the rear. No one speaks.* SNOWBALL, *bending from car to the floor, mechanically unloads the coal.* PETERS *comes up with a bucket of mortar. They work quietly, timing their movements, no one speaking.* FRANK *stands alone playing the light on the rising wall. Finally he speaks.*]

FRANK. That was a heavy blast, Mr. Knowles.

KNOWLES. 'T was close by, too.

SNOWBALL. Wonder how many men got caught.

KNOWLES. It's noon, and the men on the way out, there's no tellin'.

PETERS. Hope the old hole don't catch fire. Got me clothes burnt off onct. To hell with a job like this.

BARTO. Soma day I leeva thees damn country.

KNOWLES. Get over, Barto, and less talking. More slime, Peters.

PETERS. [*Comes with a bucket.*] Righto.

FRANK. Wonder what caused the blast.

PETERS. The little butterflies out in the sunshine, they causes it.

KNOWLES. Another country heard from. [*Some one coughs.*]

FRANK. Who's coughing?

BARTO. Who maka da dust? Cut out.

PETERS. I didn't make no dust.

SNOWBALL. Shut up.

KNOWLES. Stop your fussin'.

SNOWBALL. [*After a pause.*] Build a wall . . . build a wall . . . one, two, three, four. [*The others add.*] Build a wall . . . build a wall . . . one, two, three, four . . . one, two, three, four. [*They work on quietly.*]

BARTO. Golla! What time it ees?

PETERS. You ain't goin' nowheres, Wop.

FRANK. Smart guy, that Peters.

SNOWBALL. A punch in the nose'd help him a hell of a lot.

PETERS. Yeh? Who's goin' to do it?

SNOWBALL. I will. Right now. [*Goes for him.* BARTO *starts to help.*]

KNOWLES. Cut out that racket! Get back to your places, you punks. What's the matter with you? [*They stand for a moment glowering at each other, then go quietly back to work. The dripping water beats endlessly.*]

BARTO. Who starta da fuss?

FRANK. He did, Peters.

KNOWLES. Stop that!

PETERS. Say, white-wash, your conduct is inexcusable. Get the hell out of the mine.

KNOWLES. Pipe down. Come on, more coal, more

water. The gas is comin' in. Wake up, you punks. [*They work lively for a time.*]

SNOWBALL. Big Jake, you see any rats lately?

KNOWLES. Rats? Not for days. That ain't unusual, though. I don't leave 'em much scraps to eat these days, with only two days' work a week.

BARTO. You maka bigga meestake, Bigga Jake. Da rat ees goot friend. Him tell da secrets. Him leeva da room quick when coma da explosh. Feeda da rat, you gotta da friend.

KNOWLES. You're right, old timer. I seen a bloody fight in the pit one time. Whew! Some new fellow killed a rat for getting in his dinner bucket. The boys near mobbed the poor devil. Might as well kill a man as a rat down below. Get off my foot, somebody!

SNOWBALL. Put your foot in your pocket.

PETERS. This here's sure luck . . . I was goin' to knock off. I'm quittin' this shadow chasin' business.

KNOWLES. Less talk an' more work.

SNOWBALL. The mine blowed over for the day, and I was going home.

BARTO. Him blow over, but we worka just da same.

FRANK. [*Impatiently.*] Don't you think you'd better work a little faster. [*He coughs.*] I can smell something!

KNOWLES. Never you fear, my boy. The old wall's comin' right along. I was goin' home to work in my garden. What was you goin' to do, Barto?

BARTO. Oh, I maka da wine. Gotta da permit yesterday. American probish, huh! Goddam, I am hot. Snowball, what you do?

SNOWBALL. [*Wearily.*] Ah wus going to work on my new home.

KNOWLES. Got it paid for yet?

SNOWBALL. Not yet, Mister Jake. But next winter, if the mines work steady. The realtor, he is very considerate. Ah only made him half a payment last month, but he granted me a moratorium on the balance.

KNOWLES. I see, That's good. Will somebody scratch my back.

SNOWBALL. [*Scratching his back.*] And when Ah gets my new home paid fo', Ah'll be residin' on my own property, thank the Lord.

KNOWLES. Higher, that's better. Yes, a man ought to own his own home. I ain't selfish, but I always wanted more than to live from hand to mouth.

FRANK. [*Feeling as if he were being left entirely out of the conversation.*] Anybody does. About all I ever managed was a couple of pigeon holes somewhere in an apartment house.

PETERS. You guys give me a pain, talkin' about home. How d'you know you'll see home again?

SNOWBALL. Crape hanger.

FRANK. I guess everybody has troubles. Barto, you pay rent?

BARTO. [*Tired out.*] Shoo, boy, to da companee. Da companee taka da rent outa da pay check. I no getta behind. I send da mon to Italy. Da sunshine there. But soma day, I getta rich, buy da blind pig, American style, smoka da big black cigar, den I . . .

SNOWBALL. We know . . . you're going to leave this damn country.

BARTO. Shoo.

KNOWLES. [*Himself almost exhausted.*] Then you don't like America?

BARTO. [*Breathing hard.*] Yes, lika. Ees all right to maka da mon. People in da bigga hurree in thees countree. American ees damn fool, buy da automobile, buy da home, buy da furniture, buy every damn thing. Then he dress up in da big red necktie and stall, da sama time he work lika hell. That ees your America.

KNOWLES. There's all kinds of people in the world, my friend, all kinds.

PETERS. [*Exhausted.*] I'd give my wife for a cigarette.

SNOWBALL. You'll smoke hereafter.

PETERS. I don't care.

KNOWLES. It ain't nothin' to crow about, these mines. I often said to Annie, I'd as soon be in that hot place with my back broke, as in a mine in heaven. Just pick away, pick away.

BARTO. Worka and eata. No worka, no eata.

SNOWBALL. Don't you worry. Build a wall . . . build a wall . . . One, two, three, four. [*The others repeat after him. Finally their voices become almost inaudible and they work for a time in silence.*]

KNOWLES. Well, that ought to hold her. [*He draws his bandana and mops his face laboriously.*]

BARTO. [*Quickly lying down flat on his back.*] By Golla! Now I taka da vacash. No vacash in long time I gotta.

KNOWLES. Who ever heard tell of an underground savage takin' a vacation? [*The men stand looking and examining the wall, paying no attention to* BARTO *and* FRANK, *who holds the light and stares at the protecting wall doubtfully.*]

FRANK. [*Worried.*] How long will we have to stay down here?

KNOWLES. Depends on how bad the old hole blew up.

Whew! I'm hotter'n a July baby. [*He sits down and breathes deeply.*]

FRANK. Hadn't somebody better try to get through, and take word? [*This remark evokes a snicker or two.*]

KNOWLES. No livin' thing with lungs can get through that afterdamp. [*The men stare at* KNOWLES.]

FRANK. But what if we don't get out?

KNOWLES. [*After a pause.*] We'll get out. Better sit down an' take it easy for a spell. [FRANK *remains standing.*]

FRANK. How do you know? I got a wife and kid to think of?

KNOWLES. We all have.

FRANK. [*Nervously.*] How long, at the most, will it be?

KNOWLES. I don't know. Sit down. [*There is a pause. The men look at* FRANK, *who continues to stare at the barricade searchingly.* KNOWLES *takes his cards and begins to deal quietly.*] Suppose we have a little game, or somethin'? [*The men nod.*] Jacks or better, an' ten ton for the limit in this game. [*The men pick up their cards.*]

PETERS. Pass,

BARTO. [*Without even looking at his cards.*] Betta da ton of coal.

SNOWBALL. Stand and draw three. [*He puts in.*]

KNOWLES. [*Dealing.*] I'll stay. Hold the light. [*He puts in.*]

SNOWBALL. Two here. [*They examine their cards.*]

BARTO. Betta ten ton da coal. [*He counts out lumps of coal.*]

SNOWBALL. [*Seriously.*] Stay. [*He puts in.*]

KNOWLES. [*Scratches his head.*] Looks like a fast game. [*A pause.*] Say Barto, turn on that blame radio now. [BARTO *does so and the radio makes a series of harsh noises.*]

PETERS. Turn that damn thing off!

THE RADIO. Bur-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-rr—r-r-r-r-r-

PETERS. Turn it off!

KNOWLES. Let it go. There'll be plenty time to rest. Maybe we'll hear somethin', news. [*The radio continues to squawk.* KNOWLES *looks at his cards, studies the faces of the men.*] Let me see, Barto, he opened the pot. [*There is an intense silence. The dripping water beats endlessly.*]

THE RADIO. Bur-r-r-r-r-report . . . last minute news , . .

KNOWLES. Listen!

THE RADIO. . . . Word has just been received that a great explosion wrecked Stony Creek Mine. . . . All men checked out at noon but six. . . . These men are lost. [*A silence falls on the room. The men look at one another.*]

KNOWLES. Whose play?

PETERS. I'll call that bet.

SNOWBALL. If you gamble, you lose, as the saying goes. Your play, Jake.

FRANK. How long will it be.

KNOWLES. [*Studying his cards.*] How long? God only knows. [*There is a pause.* KNOWLES *lays down his cards.*] Show your openers. [*A pause. There is another series of explosions, violent thunder and roaring. The men spring to their feet. The barricade on the left crumbles to the floor. There is silence. A red glare shines from the left.*]

SNOWBALL. We are done for.

KNOWLES. [*Quietly.*] The game is over. [*The men face one another.*]

PETERS. Gas! Fire!

KNOWLES. Quiet!

FRANK. Has anybody got a pencil and paper?

KNOWLES. We all have somethin' to write.

SNOWBALL. If anybody gets out, let him tell Mrs. Jackson that Ah was saved.

BARTO. Senda da word to my fam in Italy, say I coma home, but first coma da explosh.

PETERS. I don't care. I just don't care.

KNOWLES. Come over by the car, boys. [*They move wearily over to the pit car.*] Give Frank your big knife, Snowball. [*He does so.*] Give Snowball the light, Frank. [*He hands over the flashlight to* SNOWBALL *and kneels before the car with the knife.*] Write, now, as I tell you. . . . About noon, Saturday . . . gas bad. . . . Can't last much longer. . . . We are thinkin' of our wives . . . an' children . . . an' God. [*The men stand in silence and watch* FRANK *scratch the letters on the side of the car.* BARTO *crosses himself.* SNOWBALL *kneels and prays in silence.* PETERS *stands silent, his face frozen into an expressionless stare. They shake hands with one another kindly. Finally* FRANK *rises and takes* KNOWLES *by the hand. The red glare becomes brighter and the musical tinkle of dripping water continues its eternal beat as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ON THE WAY HOME

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CHARACTERS

THE BANKER
BUCK
CALBERT
LOMELI
BILL
CHARLIE
LAWSON
ANDERSON
CARTER
CARLOTTA
TWO WOMEN
A POLICEMAN
THE HOBO
COAL MINERS

ON THE WAY HOME

SCENE—*Interior of Calbert's half-way house on the main traveled road between Marion and Herrin, in the coalfields of southern Illinois. The room is unpainted, and the new boards show signs of having been hurriedly thrown together. There is a door on the right, forward. A gambling table is mounted on trestles, behind which sits the dealer of what is generally known as the bank.* THE BANKER *is a florid-faced man of forty with a green eye-shade pulled across his forehead at a sharp angle. He wears a loud silk shirt whose flaunting color both advertises its expense and lends a kind of aggressive dignity to his profession. He is reading a copy of the Police Gazette.*

The rear wall, like the wall on the right, is literally plastered with pictures and illustrations culled from newspapers and sporting journals—prize-fighters, actresses, dancers—some of them in the nude. On the right is an open door through which may be seen a solitary card player sitting at table, quietly smoking a cigarette, his long slender fingers shuffling the cards. In the center is a door giving view to a stairway in which stands a young woman of twenty-four or five.

She is smoking a cigarette and reading a flashy magazine. Her painted face and colored attire advertises the oldest profession in the world.

On the left is the bar. There is also a back-bar with a mirror on which is written in bold letters: "In Money We Trust." Other placards, such as "Don't be Funny —No Credit," and "Ask for Credit at your own risk" are placed conspicuously about the bar. The general arrangement of the bar and the glittering array of glasses and bottled goods—together with an expensive cash register and a schedule board on which is checked the names of the mines working from day to day—all give the impression that the proprietor does a nightly business and has set himself up for permanent trade. At the end of the bar, forward, is a door which opens on the inside and which admits entrance to the house.

At the forward end of the bar are CALBERT, BUCK, *and* LOMELI. LOMELI, *a large, squat swarthy Italian with a round shaved head, is holding a baby in his arms, making a great to-do over the child,* CALBERT *and* BUCK *look on, and* LOMELI *holds a glass of whiskey to the baby's lips. The baby protests, spills the liquor, and* LOMELI *hurriedly drinks the contents of the glass, shrugs and starts to go.* CALBERT, *the proprietor, a rather good-looking man of fifty wearing a diamond horseshoe pin in his tie, laughs and goes behind the bar,*

LOMELI. I t'ink I better went. It ees time, mebbe, dem undergrount savages come. [*He waves his hand and nods.*]

CALBERT. Wait. [CALBERT *places a jug of whiskey on the bar.*] Here, this for you. [*Then he takes a roll of bills from his pocket and gives several of them to* LOMELI.] This, too.

LOMELI. [*His face beaming.*] T'anks. [*He takes the money eagerly, thrusts it into his pocket and starts to go.*]

CALBERT. What's your hurry? Listen. [*Staring directly into his face—after a pause.*] Keep up the good work. Don't forget to tell them shadow chasers every day or two—especially on pay-day—what a big winning you always make in my place. Show 'em your roll. That ought to bring 'em around in a hurry.

LOMELI. Yees, Cal, I tell dem undergrount savages, Americun scum. You my friend.

CALBERT. [*Coldly.*] To hell with your friendship. Do what I tell you. [*He stares for a moment at* LOMELI, *then comes around the end of the bar and faces him, lifting the lower part of his vest and revealing the handle of a pistol.* LOMELI'S *eyes dilate, then he frowns.*] The mines paid off heavy today and I'm expecting to make a haul tonight. If the miners don't come, I'm

thinking you've been asleep on the job. [*There is a pause.*] And in that case— [*He taps the handle of his pistol.*]

LOMELI. Dey come, you see, moocha damn fools.

BUCK. [*Tapping* LOMELI *on the shoulder.*] It might be wise, wop, not to show yourself around here tonight. Close the door when you go out.

LOMELI. Sure. It ees wise I am. [*He smiles his placid, over-polite smile.*] Gooda-bye. [*He turns to* THE BANKER.] Gooda-bye, da bank. [THE BANKER *nods.*] Huh, I no gamble ma money. To Italy I senda, not to you. Soma day I leeva thees damn countree. [*He goes out.* CALBERT, BUCK, *and* THE BANKER *roar with laughter.*]

BUCK. That's right. Put the fear of hell in that wop and he'll work for you. [*He begins to wipe off the bar with a professional air.* CALBERT *lights a cigar and stands for a moment admiring himself in the mirror. Then he moves across to the gambling table on the right, leans upon the table. The girl in the stairway door looks around at him with an air of disgust.*]

CALBERT. I want to pay for this place tonight, Banker. Now change the dice in a hurry. That's what I'm paying *you* for.

THE BANKER. [*Laying aside his Police Gazette.*]

What's the signal? You know I've got to bait the hook first.

CALBERT. [*Puffing on his cigar—thoughtfully.*] We don't want no slips. Let's see— Got any idees?

THE BANKER. Well, in Chicago—

CALBERT. This is Bloody Williamson County!

THE BANKER. But we can't be so crude as to use loaded dice. [*He lights a cigarette.*] How's this? What's the matter with Buck over there firing a shot in the floor. That'll turn 'em around to the bar in a hurry, then I'll switch the bones.

CALBERT. [*Impressed with the idea.*] You ain't dead from the shoulders up, are you? That's the go. I don't want any free-for-alls in my place. This is going to be a respectable place, and I'm going to get *all* the trade. [THE BANKER *nods.* CALBERT *turns to* BUCK.] Get me? [BUCK *nods.*]

BUCK. I ain't dumb, brother—I ain't worked in Chicago for nothing. I'm for the good of the firm. I believe in respectability—yep. [*He continues to shine up the bar.*] Sure, I'll shoot off the old gat.

CALBERT. [*With an air of importance—very much pleased.*] Do your stuff, both of you. [*He thrusts his hands into his pockets and stands looking around the room.*] I got a hunch if you guys was so damn sharp,

you'd still be in Chicago. Things had better go off right. [*He spits upon the floor. He has no sooner spoken the words when the door on the left opens. A one-legged* HOBO *enters and pecks his way like a vulture across to the gambling table.* CALBERT *stares at him.* THE BANKER *rises upon his stool and leans on the table.*]

THE BANKER. Away from the table, Cripple. [*There is a pause.*] Away! [THE HOBO *pecks his way across the far end of the room and hovers like a shadow with his elbows on the bar.* CALBERT *moves across and faces him from behind the bar.*]

CALBERT. What luck do you bring, unfortunate?

THE HOBO. Thank God for crutches. I bring you luck. [*He remains motionless, staring into space.*]

CALBERT. I hope so. [*Doubtfully.*] Never seen a cripple yet what brought luck. [*After a pause.*] What'll you have. [THE HOBO *snaps his fingers.* BUCK *brings a bottle of beer.*] Well, drink all you want, but don't forget to tell your buddies on the road that this is a good place; they'll be treated right here. [THE HOBO *nods.*] But stay away from the table. [*Again* THE HOBO *nods, then he remains silent, seeming not to move a muscle except when he drinks. The eyes of* BUCK, CALBERT, THE BANKER, *and* THE PROSTITUTE *center on* THE HOBO. *Finally* CALBERT *comes up to the cash register and begins to count the money mechani-*

cally. The door on the right opens and a POLICEMAN *in full uniform comes in. He smiles sheepishly, looks around, then crosses over to the bar.*]

THE POLICEMAN. Evenin', Calbert? Open for business, it appears.

CALBERT. No, this is a charitable institution.

THE POLICEMAN. Been a little warm today.

CALBERT. Yeh? What'll you have?

THE POLICEMAN. Now you know I never drink a thing —except beer, an' whiskey, an' gin. [CALBERT *nods to* BUCK, *who places a bottle of whiskey and a glass upon the bar.* THE POLICEMAN *drinks.*] Ah! [*He puts out his hand behind him.* CALBERT *goes around the far end of the bar, comes forward and knocks off the ashes of his cigar in* THE POLICEMAN'S *hand. The hand does not move. He takes another drink.*] Ah!

CALBERT. [*Placing a roll of money in the hand.*] I believe in the integrity of the law.

THE POLICEMAN. [*Pocketing the money and taking another drink.*] Ah!

CALBERT. Is this your birthday or something?

THE POLICEMAN. Nice place you got here.

CALBERT. It will be if them petty politicians let me alone. Who sent you, them?

THE POLICEMAN. The sewin' circle.

CALBERT. Will you go to hell?

THE POLICEMAN. [*Taking another drink.*] Yes, sir. [*He turns around and faces* CALBERT *squarely.*] Good luck, but remember, all on the quiet. No scrapes here, no killings, or you close up. [*He walks to the stairway door and talks to* THE PROSTITUTE. *She resists him.*]

CALBERT. [*Going up to* THE PROSTITUTE.] Get along upstairs with him. [THE PROSTITUTE *gives him a stern look of disgust, then turns and goes upstairs.* THE POLICEMAN *winks and follows her.* CALBERT *stands looking up the stairway.*] Say, chief? Better go down the back way when you leave. If you hear anything, don't hear it. Get me. [THE POLICEMAN *answers halfway up the stairs.*] All right. [CALBERT *waits at the far end of the bar, smoking seriously. Two miners enter, their caps pushed back on their heads and their lamps extinguished.* BILL, *a large, fat man with a good-natured smile, moves across to the bar.* CHARLIE, *a wiry ghost of a little man, slides up beside him.*]

BILL. Back-breakin' toil it is, Charlie, an' if you wasn't my loadin' buddy, you'd starve to death. With my strength, we dig coal.

CHARLIE. An' if it wasn't for me intelligence, you'd a-been soaked up on a blotter an' carried out of the mine long ago. God, I'm thirsty.

BILL. [*Nodding and smiling at* BUCK *and* CALBERT.] Hullo? How 'bout a stein of beer, long an' tall, foam on bottom, your honor. [*He places a bill on the bar and* BUCK *serves him.*]

BUCK. [*Ringing up the money and giving* BILL *his change.*] Your change, sir, four-seventy.

CHARLIE. [*Laying a bill on the bar.*] Snops for me, an' hurry up, before I kick the heels off yer shoes. [*He spits contemptuously.*] Ut!

BUCK. [*Serving him a glass of whiskey.*] Your change, little one—four twenty-five.

BILL. Another stein. I could drink the old Mississippi dry tonight. [*He chuckles over his own remark.*] Only water is bad for workin' men. [*Looks at himself through the mirror.*] I'm goin' home early tonight.

CHARLIE. Git out. [*He turns to* BUCK.] What's the matter with yer? Give me a drink before I wring yer neck, scamp. [BUCK *serves them with pleasure and they drink thirstily, staring at themselves through the mirror.*] Bill, you old son-of-a-gun, you look like an elephant with a cap on. [*He roars with laughter.*]

BILL. [*Very seriously.*] Well, anything what's to last a long time takes a long time to grow—consider the elephant. [*Both break out in laughter and swing upon the bar.*]

CHARLIE. [*Shakes hands with* BILL.] Put her there. Say, Bill, who the devil are ye?

BILL. [*With a kind of dignity.*] Why, small speck, I'm the guy what digs all the coal. Who are you?

CHARLIE. Me? Oh, I'm a Democrat.

BILL. So that's what's the matter with you? Put her there. [*They shake hands.*] Another stein, Buck. I got to go home early tonight.

CHARLIE. [*An idea dawning in his mind.*] What d'yer say, Bill, we drink up an' then try our luck? [*He jerks his thumb at the table and* BILL *nods doubtfully.*] There's luck in this place, I'm tellin' yer. [CALBERT *catches their eyes and nods.*] How's the dice runnin'?

CALBERT. Good. [*With an affected, worried look.*] I swear, luck goes against me these days. That wop, Lomeli, made a cleaning in here last night.

CHARLIE. So I heard. Everybody's talkin' 'bout yer place. Yer what yer call a square an' honest gambler, ain't yer?

CALBERT. Yes, boy, you'll be treated right here. [CALBERT *looks at his watch and then retires to the poker room in the rear. A* SECOND PROSTITUTE *appears in the stairway door and stands.* BILL *and* CHARLIE *continue to admire themselves in the mirror, smiling and holding their glasses. Notes from a piano, badly out of tune, sounds from the rooms overhead.*]

CHARLIE. There's wimin here. I can feel 'em in the air. [*He glances around and sees* THE PROSTITUTE *in the stairway door, slips by* BILL *and goes upstairs with her.* BILL *does not miss him.*]

BILL. Yep, Charlie, I'm goin' home early, goin' to cut out this Saturday night stuff. [*He turns, and seeing that* CHARLIE *has disappeared, gulps down the remaining portion of his beer. The music stops.*] Where the devil did he go?

BUCK. Upstairs with the angel.

BILL. That Bohunk wife of his'n'll be after him with her back bowed, the little shrimp.

BUCK. Serves him right. That's what a white man gets for marrying one of them wops.

BILL. All right, I guess—good people. They work like blazes an' save their money to send back to the old country. [*He moves across to the gambling table and stands looking on.*]

THE BANKER. [*Throwing a pair of dice on the table.*] Try your luck, big boy?

BILL. No, I'm goin' home after a bit. [*He looks at the dice curiously.*] I was never much on the other fellow's game.

[THE BANKER *resumes his reading and* BILL *leans upon the table leisurely. The sound of a motor bus is heard*

outside and a moment later the doors open and miners begin to pour into the room—Americans, negroes, foreigners, and three or four swarthy types of distinctly Italian extraction who stand together at the end of the bar, forward, chattering among themselves and smoking stogies. Each face—white, black, or dark—has the stolid, unimaginative expression of the prisoner—the isolated workman; and on the faces of many of the men there are black marks, the inevitable and inerasable scars left by coal dust healed in the flesh. Under the blazing glare of the high candle power lights these marks on the faces of the white men are most conspicuous. The men range in age from twenty to sixty, but all alike are moulded by the environment of the coal pit—a certain squint of the eye, searching, penetrating —eyes that a man might be afraid to look into. They light pipes and cigarettes and order drinks.

While each has about him his own rough, dynamic individuality, he carries with him bodily the atmosphere of his trade; and remains a type as inseparable from his fellows as a blade of grass in a meadow. Some of the men remain at the bar drinking; others, having drank hurriedly, turn to the gambling table on the right; while others, the more intelligent looking among the men, retire to the poker room in the rear. The room is instantly filled with roaring conversation, punctuated by loud explosions of laughter and boisterous exclamations.

LAWSON, *a tall, hulking rough with shaggy eyebrows, shouts to the bartender and pounds upon the bar.*]

LAWSON. Give me a charge of dynamite, an' don't pay so much attention to them wops o'er there. [*He takes out a roll of bills and slams them on the bar.*] By God, I've got the money! Don't think them hunkies dig all the coal. [BUCK *draws a stein of beer and places it before him.*] Whiskey, you baby-faced weakling, dynamite!

BUCK. [*Pouring a glass of whiskey—quietly.*] Would you like it with ground glass or without?

LAWSON. Dry up. [*He gulps down his whiskey and motions for more.* BUCK *starts to take the beer away.* ANDERSON, *an enormous man with a mop of hair hanging down in his eyes, reaches for the stein—bellowing.*]

ANDERSON. Hold on there, bartender. I'll take that beer. [*He takes the stein and comes to the end of the bar, forward, stares at the* ITALIANS *with a cynical grin, then dashes the beer into their faces. The* ITALIANS *break out in excited chatter, wipe their faces and try to relight their stogies.* ANDERSON *stands facing them, eager for a fight.*] Bohunks, a word out of one of ye an' I'll crack this stein o'er your heads! [*He jerks the stein as if he were going to strike and the* ITALIANS *cower in the corner, which causes a fresh outburst of laughter from the men at the bar.*]

CARTER. [*A wiry little man smoking a cob pipe.*] Leave the garlic snappers be, Andy, an' come up for a drink on your Daddy. [*He waves his hands in the air and pounds upon the bar.*] A round for all. [*The men call out their drinks in rapid succession and* BUCK *serves them.*] Well, here's to hell with work—any kind. [*They drink.*] Ah-a-a-a-a-a-a-h! [*As they put their glasses and bottles on the bar,* CHARLIE *appears in the stairway door. He is feeling the effects of his drinking and he reels as he comes forward into the room. The men turn to him, roaring with laughter.*]

CHARLIE. Hurray. The gang's all here, an' I'm a Democrat! [*The men shout and slap him on the back, almost knocking him to his knees.*] I have one hell of a time upstairs. [*He laughs heartily, lifts his finger and becomes serious.*] I say, I punch me one woman in the snoot. They don't try their tricks on me. [*He spits contemptuously on the floor.*] Ut!

LAWSON. That hunky wife o' your'n'll scratch your eyes out, Charlie, you foolin' 'round with other women.

CHARLIE. To hell with Carlotta!

ANDERSON. [*Giving him a tremendous blow on the back.*] Thata boy! [*The others add their congratulations.*] To hell with Carlotta! To hell with women! Hurray! Charlie's a Democrat, etc. [*They pitch him into the air.*]

CHARLIE. [*Trying to keep upright and get their attention.*] Lishun, punks. [*The men listen.*] Ish come before you dish evenin' to tell you that if Ish 'lected mayor of dish town, dish town will be absholutely wet! [*There are cries of applause.*]

ALL. Hurray! Charlie for mayor! Speech, speech Mr. Mayor, etc.

CHARLIE. Now, lishun. Pipe down, punks. Shay, didya hear what a winnin' that wop Lomeli made? A clean-up, he did.

LAWSON. What he did. I seen his roll—lucky bohunk of a wop, I says to him. [*The men nod and speak among themselves enthusiastically. They turn to the table.*]

CHARLIE. An' if that there wop can clean up, we can, too. [*He reels around and marches directly to the gambling table. The others follow him and crowd in.*] Give me a pair of bones, an' square uns too.

[THE BANKER *throws a pair of dice on the table.* CALBERT *appears in the door of the poker room and stands looking on.* BILL *crosses over to the bar, orders beer, and stands looking into the mirror. The silent* HOBO *remains motionless at the end of the bar. The* ITALIANS *at the forward end of the bar chatter among themselves and look at the men at the table as they begin gambling. Their voices become mingled together as* THE BANKER *calls out the shots in monotone.*]

Watch your own money, boys.
And he throws seven and wins.
Thata boy, Charlie.
Roll them bones.
Put your money on the pass line.
Let 'em roll.
Eight for a point.
Who bets on the field?
Two bucks on the field.
Throwed a tray and I pay the field.
Up jumped a pair of snake eyes.
Coming out. Eight and he makes his point.
Shoot the pay check, Banker.
Watch your own money, boys.
Another seven. Money on the line.
If this keeps up we'll have to send to town for more money.
Roll 'em, brother.
A pair of fours. Will he make it?
Thirty-six to one the gentleman don't throw twelve.
Do you know any more jokes, Banker?
Coming out on eight. Throwed seven.
Shoot the pay check.
Up jumped the devil.
Pass the dice to the next man.

[*The dice are passed from man to man around the table and the indistinguishable hum of voices and the tinkle of silver fills the room. Suddenly the door on the left is flung open and* CARLOTTA *comes in. She is a short little*

woman with a red shawl around her shoulders. She stops in the middle of the room, her arms akimbo, quickly singles out CHARLIE *and goes up behind him. She gives him a boot in the seat of the pants.*]

CARLOTTA. Thees ees where you come! No coma home on pay day?

CHARLIE. [*Taken by surprise—turning around.*] Why, Carlotta, what do you want here?

CARLOTTA. [*Impishly taking him by the ear.*] Monee, monee, monee! No gamble away! [*She tugs at his ear and tries to pull him away from the table. Some of the men blurt out in laughter, some of them grin, their faces assuming a superior smile of malicious entertainment.* CHARLIE, *between the devil and the deep sea, tries to laugh the matter off. This brings from the men a tremendous crescendo of boisterous laughter.* CHARLIE *gathers up all his courage and open-handedly smacks* CARLOTTA *down. She falls sprawling backwards; there is a pause, and during the momentary interval of silence the faces of the men assume expressions of pity and sympathy.* CARLOTTA *springs to her feet like a cat and turns upon* THE BANKER.] I hope your soul burns in hell!

THE BANKER. [*Rising upon his stool and pointing his finger at* CHARLIE.] Take her out, miner! Take her out! [*There is a pause of intense silence.* CARLOTTA *goes out holding her head.*]

CHARLIE. [*All ruffled up.*] To hell with wimin! I think I marry a hell cat. [*He whirls round to the table.*] On with the game. [*The room becomes comparatively quiet as the men turn to the business of gambling. The bartender pretends to busy himself by mopping off the bar.* BILL *stands leaning upon the bar, watching with a detached air the reflection of the men at the table.* THE HOBO, *at the far end of the bar, blinks, shifts his weight, and as if he were a man frozen into dumb immobility, remains silent.*]

BUCK. [*To make conversation.*] And so the world goes.

BILL. I don't care for that sort of thing.

BUCK. No?

BILL. Never thought Charlie'd do such a thing.

BUCK. What he gets for marrying the wench.

BILL. How long you lived in Bloody Williamson?

BUCK. All my life. I was brought up here.

BILL. Married?

BUCK. Yes. I got a good wife.

BILL. Love her?

BUCK. No.

BILL. What made you marry her, then?

BUCK. Can't cook myself and don't like restaurant grub.

BILL. You don't look like a man who'd hit his wife.

BUCK. Not less she gets on her high horse. [*He lights a cigarette.*] I used to have trouble once in a while. She blamed it on me working in the mines, so I got another job.

BILL. Guess workin' in the mines does change some people. Never affected me much.

BUCK. Confinement don't bother some people, Big Bill, but some it does. Now I can't stand being pent up.

BILL. Well, I've sure dug a lot of coal in my day.

BUCK. Like it?

BILL. Always thought I'd like to try my hand at somethin' else. Good money in it at times, but there's the strikes an' off days.

BUCK. A coal digger can't be chooser. That's why I quit.

BILL. I don't mind hard work myself.

BUCK. It's a hell of a way to make a living. That's all I got to say. [*He wipes off the bar.*]

BILL. [*After a pause—resenting the remark.*] I'll trouble you not to make fun of my trade, bartender.

BUCK. [*Indifferently.*] I'm not making light of your trade, big boy. I'm just telling you what I think of it. [*He appears at a loss for something to do for a moment and turns his back on* BILL *and arranges the glasses on the bar as a matter of small detail.*]

BILL. [*Staring into the mirror—drowsily.*] I guess maybe there's somethin' in what you just said—diggin' that coal all the time. [BUCK *pays no attention to him. The room is quiet.*] Well, I guess I ought to be goin' home, now, bein' as I got to practice up for band concert tomorrow night. [*He takes a drink from his bottles, stands looking into the mirror. There is a knock on the door at the left.* BUCK *goes to the door, speaks a few words with some one outside, then returns to the bar.*]

BUCK. It's your wife outside, Bill. Wants you to come home before you blow in all your pay. Says the kids are awful sick again.

BILL. All right, I'm goin' in a minute, now. Tell her I ain't been here, or somethin'. I don't like her to worry. [BUCK *goes back to the door, speaks a few words and returns.*]

BUCK. [*As* BILL *drinks up.*] More beer?

BILL. [*After a pause.*] No, whiskey. [BUCK *serves him and turns round with a smile. The conversation of the*

Italians becomes louder as they stand watching the table from the bar.]

BUCK. That's a good game there, Bill. Better get into it. [BILL *nods; finally turns round and stands with his elbows on the bar.* BUCK *takes a revolver from his hip pocket, pretends to examine it, fires a shot into the floor. The report jerks the men around with a sudden start.* ANDERSON *looks at* BUCK, *then crosses over to the bar.*]

ANDERSON. What in Hell fire's the big idea? Be damn careful how you handle that gat. [*He glowers at him and jerks out his own pistol. The men at the table crowd round.* THE BANKER *changes the dice.*]

BUCK. [*Hurriedly apologizing.*] No matter, Anderson. I was cleaning her—didn't know she was loaded.

ANDERSON. Yeh? I damn near got my brains blowed out with a gun that wasn't loaded. [BUCK *places the revolver on the back-bar and assumes a disinterested air.*] Any rough stuff going on here, I'll be in it, see? [*He places his gun in his belt and stalks back to the table.*] An' if I don't have luck in this game in a minute, there'll be hell a-popping. [*He places money on the pass line.*] Ten berries I pass. [*He rolls the dice.*] What the hell you know about that? [*He places more money on the line and rolls the dice.*] What the hell's the matter with them bones? [THE BANKER *remains stolid, raking in the money.* ANDERSON *places more*

money on the line and once more rolls the dice.] My whole pay check I pass. [*There is a pause.*] God o' mighty! Crooked house! [*He throws the leather dice cup defiantly on the table, crosses over to the bar and gulps down a glass of whiskey. After a moment he returns to the table.* THE BANKER *continues to gather in the money. The silver tinkles.*]

LAWSON. Somethin' damn funny 'bout them dice. Say, Banker, I heard that wop, Lomeli, cleaned up here last night?

THE BANKER. Right. Left here last night with a roll—lucky wop. Watch your own money, boys. Keep the dice moving. [*The men continue to gamble.* LOMELI *comes in and stands with the* ITALIANS, *who greet him and give him a stogy. He is drunk, and he jerks his thumb insinuatingly at the men around the table.*]

LOMELI. Dem Americun scum, huh. Dey tink dey win. Dey win, not. [CALBERT *appears in the door of the poker room, suddenly sees* LOMELI *and hurries across to him, persuading him to get out.* ANDERSON *turns to the bar for another drink and sees* CALBERT'S *attempts to get* LOMELI *out of the house.*]

ANDERSON. [*Coming up behind* LOMELI.] So you're the lucky wop?

CALBERT. He's drunk. I don't want him in my place.

ANDERSON. Listen, wop, if you're so lucky, come over

an' show us how you do it. [*Bellowing.*] Right now! [*He takes* LOMELI *by the neck and boots him across to the table.* CALBERT *tries to stop him.*] Go ahead, bohunk, show us how it's done. [*He kicks him and* LOMELI *places money on the pass line. There is a pause.* LOMELI *rolls the dice and* THE BANKER *takes the money.*] Go ahead, wop, put down your hard-earned money, all of it. [*He does so and loses with each roll of the dice.*] Skunk, why can't you win? [LOMELI *cowers before him, and* CALBERT, *standing in the middle of the floor, looks on.* LOMELI *utters something defiantly in their faces and the men line up across the room.*

ANDERSON *gives* LOMELI *a kick.*] This is one pay day you don't send your jack back to the old country.

[LOMELI *cowers and tries to slink out.*]

LAWSON. [*Giving* LOMELI *a kick.*] Wop, get out!

CARTER. [*Kicking him along.*] Hunk! Skunk! Punk!

CHARLIE. [*Making a face at him.*] Dago.

LOMELI. [*At the door—turning on them.*] Americun scum. [*He jerks the door open and runs out.* ANDERSON *whips out his revolver and fires into the door. The men roar with laughter as the* ITALIANS *cower in the corner, and finally slip out.*]

CHARLIE. [*Crossing over to the bar.*] How about a

set up, Buck? I'm broke. [CALBERT *nods and* BUCK *serves him.*] Tough luck.

BUCK. [*After a pause.*] What's the matter, old man?

CHARLIE. Nothin', only how about car fare to the mines in the morning? [BUCK *takes change from the register and gives it to* CHARLIE. *He moves along the bar, and goes out the door, left. The room is fairly quiet.* THE HOBO, *at the forward end of the bar, yawns and stretches.* ANDERSON *looks at him.*]

ANDERSON. [*Crossing to* THE HOBO *and jerking him from the bar.*] So it's you, is it? Cripple, who brings bad luck to the dump. Clear out. [*He kicks him, and* THE HOBO *struggles to keep his balance.* BILL *steps up and taps* ANDERSON *on the shoulder.*]

BILL. That's enough. Go home an' sleep it off. You're drunk as a fool, an' achin' for trouble. You clear out. [THE HOBO *withdraws like a shadow to the bar.*]

ANDERSON. Who are you, piker?

BILL. Go home, Andy.

ANDERSON. Don't tell me to go home, piker. [*He draws back to strike* BILL, *and* BILL *with a sudden punch, strikes him in the stomach.* ANDERSON *drops to the floor. The crowd gathers.* THE BANKER *and* CALBERT *shout at them from behind the table. In another moment* ANDERSON *has got to his feet and the two clench.*

The table is knocked over and the money rolls upon the floor. Suddenly the men are engaged in a free-for-all fight, while some of the men scramble for the money. BUCK *rushes to the wall at the end of the bar, forward, and turns out the lights. There are groans and curses. Finally a shot is fired and a streak of flame splits the darkness. The men can be heard stumbling about. The doors are heard to open and close. There is a long silence. When one of the lights is turned on, only* CALBERT, BUCK, THE HOBO, *and* THE BANKER *are seen.* BILL *is lying upon the floor. Upstairs the piano begins to bang a wild ragtime tune. A moment later the policeman appears in the doorway.*]

THE POLICEMAN. Trouble or somethin'?

CALVERT. Coal diggers—that's all.

THE POLICEMAN. A man killed, maybe? [*There is a pause.*] Well, you close up, Calbert, till the trouble blows over. [*He walks to the door of the poker room.*] See you next payday. [*He goes out.*]

[CALBERT, BUCK, *and* THE BANKER *stand for a moment looking at one another. The piano stops playing and a moment later three or four girls come hurrying down the stairs and out the door on the left.* THE HOBO, *like a distorted thing at the end of the bar, moves, pecks his way like a vulture across to the door on the right.*]

THE HOBO. And he said he was going home early. [*And like a vulture slips out into the night.*]

CALBERT. [*As* THE BANKER *and* BUCK *get to their knees.*] Talk about luck. [*They begin to pick up the money and in the amber atmosphere their shapes resemble swine moving on the floor. In the distance a mine whistle is heard.*] Work tomorrow. Maybe things 'll be better next pay.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THE DEVILS

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CHARACTERS

JOHN RODNEY
MRS. RODNEY
BILL RODNEY

THE DEVILS

SCENE—*The kitchen of the Rodney cottage in the district of the powder plant, in the coal fields of southern Illinois. On the right, forward, is a door. In the rear, right, is a stove. Cooking utensils are hanging on the wall. There is a door in the center of the rear wall with a curtained window on the right. Under the window is a table with chairs. On the left, about the height of a man's shoulders, is a mirror. In the rear corner of the left wall is a boxed-in sink. There is an old kitchen cabinet forward. The room has a grim, barren aspect of poverty, though clean.*

The time is about eleven- thirty on a bleak winter night. The stove is heated to a red glow, which radiates a crimson light throughout the somber atmosphere of the room. The wind howls and the shutters rattle. There is a lull in the singing whistle of the wind and then the sound of stamping feet is heard on the porch outside. The door in the rear is pushed open slowly.

JOHN RODNEY *comes in, taking off his overcoat and hat, which he hangs on the door. His red jersey sweater emphasizes his frail body. His black, squinty eyes beam from his thin, red bony face with a determined stare, but about his mouth and sharp chin there*

is a strong suggestion of weakness. He looks about the room in a spirit of dejection, then he goes to the stove and warms himself. His movements denote a suppressed feeling, an innate nervous disposition—restless, worried, troubled, exhausted from fatigue. His breathing is accentuated by a conscious expanding of the chest, as if it were an effort for him to get his breath. The shrieking of the wind and the banging of the shutters cause him to turn round with a sudden jerk, and the sudden outburst of a factory whistle pulls him up sharp. He grits his teeth and clinches his fists. Finally he goes to the cabinet and begins to eat from a plate of sandwiches that have been left out for him. After a bite or two he pushes the food aside.

There are two books on the ledge of the cabinet. He takes the books, moves the table and chairs out in the center of the room and sits down, hovering like a shadow in the red glare over the table. His eyes wander, but with an effort he forces himself to concentrate and remains motionless for a moment. Restlessly, and with an air of indecision, he rises, stands for a time looking at the cabinet, then he places a chair before it and climbs upon the ledge; and with a practised hand reaches over the top of the cabinet and brings out a bottle containing a small quantity of liquor. He holds the bottle out at arm's length, looks at it, then he uncorks the bottle and drinks the entire contents.

The young fellow fights the whiskey for a moment, clutches his throat, and seems to consider whether he

has made a mistake. He replaces the bottle on the cabinet and steps down, knocking off the plate of food which falls with a crash to the floor. As he stoops to pick up the pieces, MRS. RODNEY, *his mother, appears in the door on the right. She is a pale, thin little woman holding a robe about her.*

MRS. RODNEY. That you, John?

JOHN. Yes, mother. I dropped a plate.

MRS. RODNEY. I heard it fall. I was awake.

JOHN. This time of night? Why, it's nearly twelve.

MRS. RODNEY. I was readin', son, the Bible. It's the only thing that gives me comfort any more.

JOHN. [*He staggers a little.*] Comfort—I wish . . .

MRS. RODNEY. Why, what's the matter? Don't you feel good?

JOHN. [*As the liquor begins to warm him up.*] I feel all right.

MRS. RODNEY. [*Coming into the room.*] Did your father come home with you?

JOHN. No, I left the powder plant early . . . tonight.

MRS. RODNEY. I thought you was early. [*After a pause.*] Was your father drinkin' again?

JOHN. Yes, the old devil.

MRS. RODNEY. John!

JOHN. Well.

MRS. RODNEY. John, you don't talk like yourself . . . what makes you act so?

JOHN. [*Impatiently.*] Please go to bed and leave me with my studies. [*He kisses her; she draws back, facing him with a troubled expression.*]

MRS. RODNEY. So you've begun too!

JOHN. [*Her cry brings him to himself.*] Don't. Please go to bed.

MRS. RODNEY. [*Placing her hands upon his shoulders.*] John, look at me.

JOHN. Don't, go away.

MRS. RODNEY. Did your father give you that drink?

JOHN. No. The old devil never had enough for himself.

MRS. RODNEY. I've prayed ever since you were born that you'd never start.

JOHN. [*Impatiently.*] I haven't started. My nerves were shot, and I took a drink to steady myself. [*He turns away from her and sits at the table.*]

MRS. RODNEY. [*Sitting opposite him.*] John?

JOHN. Yes.

MRS. RODNEY. Be honest with me. Did you take that drink because you craved it?

JOHN. [*Nervously.*] My nerves gave way. That powder plant with those half-naked devils cursing and grunting all night—they got on my nerves. [*A pause.*] I guess you'd want something, too, if you thought any minute would be the last.

MRS. RODNEY. I'd rather see you in your coffin than know you're goin' like your father.

JOHN. [*Miserably.*] Please! Go to bed and let me alone!

MRS. RODNEY. I'll not go to bed. How long have you been at it? The truth, now.

JOHN. Oh, what does it matter? Yes, I've taken a drink now and then, if you've got to know. But that red hot powder room is enough to drive a man mad. I can leave the stuff alone.

MRS. RODNEY. That's what your father's been sayin' for thirty years.

JOHN. He's weak. I'm stronger. I'll never be like him.

MRS. RODNEY. Just what your father said about . . . his father. Oh, I hope to God you won't.

JOHN. I guess I've got will power. Dad hasn't got any. I am stronger. Don't I try to keep him away from the bottle?

MRS. RODNEY. You, like him . . .

JOHN. Nobody can get along with the old devil. He won't listen to me. I can't stand him much longer. If he don't change, I'm going to get a room by myself.

MRS. RODNEY. John!

JOHN. I've got enough to put up with—his foul mouth and filthy mind. We've quarrelled every night for months. The other night we almost came to blows.

MRS. RODNEY. I wish you'd try to get along with your father.

JOHN. I've tried. If he'd only keep his mouth shut and leave me alone.

MRS. RODNEY. What did he say tonight?

JOHN. Nothing, tonight. But it was worse. He just stood and looked—stared and stared, as if he didn't know what to think of me. I can see his red face, as he rakes the powder, and he looks just like the devil. He wouldn't talk to me, only stared, as though he hated me. It was hell!

MRS. RODNEY. An' he wasn't drinkin' heavy?

JOHN. No. And that's what I can't understand. It's the first time he's been half-way sober in months.

MRS. RODNEY. [*After a pause.*] I wish there could be peace between you two. I guess it's the school, an' that

girl who thinks herself so fine. You didn't used to be so hard to get along with, John.

JOHN. Why did you tell him about my sweetheart—Elizabeth?

MRS. RODNEY. He wanted to know what had changed you so.

JOHN. He's always throwing up ugly things about her.

MRS. RODNEY. I thought he would understand, if I told him.

JOHN. He hates me worse than ever, and he's got the idea that I'm ashamed of him. Tonight he wouldn't have anything to do with me—that face, God!

MRS. RODNEY. Maybe he's beginnin' to understand you. He don't see through things quick like you do, John?

JOHN. No, that isn't it. He can never understand. I'm different.

MRS. RODNEY. I'm happy for you, son. I can see the change in you, since you met Elizabeth. I wonder what she is like.

JOHN. She's wonderful. But there's something about her—something that I can't understand. It's the way she looks at me, that makes me think that she, too, is ashamed of me. Good heavens, I don't want sympathy. I want respect.

MRS. RODNEY. Does she know you work in the powder plant, an' drink?

JOHN. No. And she never will. She makes me want to hold my head up. [*He takes a small photograph from his book.*] Look, isn't she beautiful?

MRS. RODNEY. [*Looking at the picture.*] A sweet girl. I used to be pretty when I was a girl. Yes, I was, John.

JOHN. I believe you. [*Admiring the picture.*] I suppose I'm reaching for the moon, but I am going to try to be worthy of her. When I think of her, of what she is, of what she stands for—beauty, purity, decency—everything that is fine and good in life, and then, when I think of my lot, of my chances, and of Dad, I can't stand it.

MRS. RODNEY. I'm afraid you don't understand your father.

JOHN. What is there so hard to understand about him? I only want him to leave me alone, and stop throwing up my school work to me, and saying things about Elizabeth.

MRS. RODNEY. You said that he didn't say anything tonight.

JOHN. And that means there will be hell when he comes home. He can't open his mouth without pouring out a stream of filth, like a sewer. I try to hold my temper. I keep telling him.

MRS. RODNEY. You ought to know by this time that you can't preach to a drunk man. You go to school every day, but you don't appear to learn nothin'. Tell your father you're sorry for what you said.

JOHN. All right. But if he says anything tonight, I'm going to have it out, then I'm going.

MRS. RODNEY. Now, John.

JOHN. I can't help it. If I stay, I will turn out like him.

MRS. RODNEY. No, no, my God, no!

JOHN. It's being here, around him, that makes me feel that way. I've been fighting my nature for a long time.

MRS. RODNEY. Don't tell me that!

JOHN. I feel like him at times. I used to wonder what was the matter with him when he'd come home drunk.

MRS. RODNEY. I remember how you'd look at him.

JOHN. He used to scare me, and coax me to drink from his bottle. He used to chase me round the room and shake the bottle in my face. I was afraid, and he would laugh . . . that face—the glaring red devil!

MRS. RODNEY. [*Almost broken.*] Your father, he done that to you.

JOHN. Yes, and I've grown up afraid of something within me. When I look at him that something possesses me. Half the time I can't sleep after working

with those half-naked, grunting, cursing devils moving about in the heating room. And when I do sleep, my brain spins out rotten, filthy dreams.

MRS. RODNEY. Stop! Stop!

JOHN. I can't help it. But whose fault is it? Father's. Last night I dreamed I was the devil myself, and I was coaxing Elizabeth to be my mistress. I was very strong, and I forced her. She looked at me and submitted with a scream.

MRS. RODNEY. Don't . . . don't tell me any more!

JOHN. It's the truth and you might as well know it. She lay in my arms, crying like a child all night, begging me to let her go. I went to sleep, and when I awoke, my body was burning with fever and my brain was on fire. But there was my sweetheart of the awful dreams. This time it was she who was coaxing me. I saw her as an old drab of the streets, and she was begging me to spend the night with her.

MRS. RODNEY. [*Broken.*] Please . . . please . . . no more . . . stop!

JOHN. Whose fault is it? Father's. And now when I go to Elizabeth's home, and she plays the piano, oh, so beautifully, I can't look her in the face.

MRS. RODNEY. [*Beating her fist on the table.*] Johnny . . . my boy . . . my baby . . .

JOHN. I've told you the truth.

MRS. RODNEY. You're killing me!

JOHN. I didn't want to tell you, but you had to know. I'm already like him. I am him.

MRS. RODNEY. [*Finally she lifts her head and faces him.*] I thought this would come out sometime.

JOHN. Forgive me. You thought I was somebody. I've even been kidding myself to think so.

MRS. RODNEY. Why did you wait till now?

JOHN. I hadn't the nerve before. I've been living a lie. I am only me—a miserable speck of grit and hell. Thank God for booze—it gives me strength—strength to live, strength to stand on my feet and work at night, strength to get my lessons and go back to school each morning, strength to look people in the face without cowering like a dog.

MRS. RODNEY. Johnny, my boy . . . you . . . like your brothers.

JOHN. I never knew what they were like.

MRS. RODNEY. Then I must tell you something now.

JOHN. Anything, you can't hurt me.

MRS. RODNEY. Your father, when he was young, was awful strong, a prizefighter he was. He fought hard

an' took his beatin's like a man. But he loved the bottle, and maybe he ain't all to blame. We girls at the factory used to go to the fight at night. There wasn't much else to do. So one night after the fight, I heard a man say to Billy—as everybody called him—"Billy," he said, "you got all livin' hell locked up inside you, but you had one too many, and you lost tonight." That was one thing your father could do, fight, but the bottle was more to him than winnin' a fight. Well, I got him to quit fightin', and I was fool enough to think I could make him quit the bottle. We was married. Sometimes us girls—we was all married by this time—would go out together with our husbands. But after your brothers was born, I didn't go nowheres any more. Your father, he couldn't get used to stayin' at home, so he kept goin' out o' nights. I tried to make him stop, then I give up, for it was leadin' to quarrels. I had the children to care for. That was before you was born, John.

JOHN. But my brothers . . . ?

MRS. RODNEY. Roy, he died in the mines, drunk. Oscar, he quarrelled with your father . . . went to the fulminatin' room . . . was killed, drunk.

JOHN. [*Staring before him.*] In the blood.

MRS. RODNEY. But Johnny, you won't give up, will you?

JOHN. [*Rising with wounded dignity.*] I guess I've got will power.

MRS. RODNEY. I'm glad. You've been my only hope. When you was growing up, I watched you. How I remember you in your first long pants. I was proud. But oh, that was the tryin' time. You always come home sober, till tonight, an' I thought you had escaped. You won't never begin again, will you?

JOHN. I tell you I've got will power. [*There is a pause.*] It's not me so much—the powder plant.

MRS. RODNEY. Then if it's the plant, why don't you quit your job?

JOHN. How would we get along? You know where Dad's money goes.

MRS. RODNEY. Yes, I know. [*There is a silence. The sound of stamping feet is heard on the porch—a heavy thud, violent swearing.* JOHN *withdraws from the table and swings around facing the door.*]

JOHN. There he is now. Please go to bed. If he finds us up talking, he'll think we're talking about him. It's nearly midnight, and I've got my studies to do. [*He kisses her tenderly.*] Good-night.

MRS. RODNEY. Good-night, Johnny. Do you promise?

JOHN. I promise.

[*He stands facing her for a moment, and a spiritual light shines from her eyes as she goes quietly out of the room.* JOHN *remains looking after her, his face*

transformed in the ecstasy of love. Then with an air of resolution, he draws a deep breath and goes to the table and sits down. He takes the picture and looks at it with an expression of confident hope. The silence is broken by an outburst of swearing on the porch. JOHN *hurriedly places the picture in the book, turns to the door with dread recognition and with clinched fists exclaims "God!" Then he bends over his books like a man obsessed.*

The door opens and BILL RODNEY *comes in. He is a little man, ill-proportioned, and the most conspicuous part of his body is his over-developed chest and shoulders which appear to be too large for his small legs. He has on a ragged overcoat which he removes and hangs on the door with his cap. His face is raw and red, parched and swollen from the heat of foundries and industrial plants, and at this moment glowing from the cold. His shaved head shows a cauliflower ear.*

BILL RODNEY *is the human personification of primitive strength and of tremendous inexhaustible energy, a beast of some vanished biological age working in modern industrial plants. He stands for a moment looking at* JOHN. *He has a peculiar habit of drawing his chin close to his stumpy neck, so that his face seems narrow and elongated but broad at the temples—a curious mixture of the dumb animal and the cunning in his face. His eyes beam from burning sockets like shafts of steel. This peculiar habit and his standing posture, together with the permanent wrinkles over his shaggy,*

arched eyebrows and a certain mannerism of drawing his lips tight over his teeth, lend to him a striking resemblance to a child's rudimentary sketch of the devil. He stares at JOHN.]

BILL. Who the hell greased the porch? [JOHN *does not look aside.*] Huh. I near busted my setter comin' in.

JOHN. [*Without looking up.*] It's the snow and ice, I guess.

BILL. [*He moves slowly to the table.* JOHN *looks up with dread expectation as* BILL *stares at him with a look of kindness on his face that approaches human pity. Under his stare,* JOHN *rises slowly and tries to look at him.*] Johnny?

JOHN. Why, father. What's the matter? [*He turns his face away.* BILL *watches him for a moment, his hands fall lifelessly to his sides, then he turns and walks slowly to the mirror on the wall. He seems to summon all his courage as he thrusts his face before the mirror. Slowly he turns to* JOHN.]

BILL. The old devil—the young devil. [JOHN *sits down to his books and glances up to see his father hovering over him.*] Johnny, why can't we get along?

JOHN. I guess we can.

BILL. Is it that girl?

JOHN. You wouldn't understand.

BILL. Me? Ashamed of me, ain't you? After what that hell-hole's done to me?

JOHN. It's you who are ashamed of me.

BILL. I been wonderin' 'bout ye t'night. Now I ain't been drinkin', so ye kint preach to me 'bout that. I ain't goin' drink no more—if I kin help it. [*There is a pause.*] Ye preach to me all the time, Johnny, but I'd like to see ye stand up under that work long's I done without somethin' to hold ye together. [*He sits down opposite* JOHN.] Strong men is sometimes weak, me boy. Ye preach to me, but ye don't know what ye say.

JOHN. Yes, I know.

BILL. I don't hate you, me boy, but ye won't have nothin' to do with me no more. I say no more about your sweetheart, nary a word more.

JOHN. I'm sorry.

BILL. I don't like ye to go on this way. . . . Why, it's . . . well . . . nobody likes me. Do you know what it is?

JOHN. No.

BILL. I'm a bit shaky, me boy. Won't you pour me a cup of coffee? [JOHN *pours coffee for him; also a cup for himself.*] What ye readin' tonight?

JOHN. [*Sitting.*] My lessons, for school.

BILL. You study them books all the time, Johnny.

JOHN. Do I want to work in that powder factory all my life?

BILL. You got spunk, me boy, workin' the way you do. But you're like a stranger in this house, an' ye never talk to me no more. You act like ye was mad all time —that girl?

JOHN. Leave her out of it. It's because you were drunk all the time. You never wanted to do what was right.

BILL. No more the bottle. I can quit it if I want to. [*He finishes his coffee.*] A little more coffee, Johny. [JOHN *pours another cup for him. As* BILL *drinks,* JOHN *withdraws from the table and crosses over to the sink, stands leaning against it. He then glances into the mirror, then looks at* BILL.] Ye come home early every night . . . don't want nothin' to do with the likes of me.

JOHN. It's not that.

BILL. [*Staring at him.*] Sit down.

JOHN. [*Crossing back to the table.*] Why do you stare like that?

BILL. I say, ye come home early every night.

JOHN. [*Sitting.*] To my studies.

BILL. That all?

JOHN. Why are you looking at me like that? What do you mean?

BILL. To your studies. I begin to know ye for the first time. Ye want to be different from the rest of us.

JOHN. It isn't that—you see . . . I hope to get a better job.

BILL. Diff'runt from us, an' Pat Slanner . . . know him?

JOHN. That big fellow in the fulminating room?

BILL. [*Nodding.*] What d'ye think of him?

JOHN. I don't know.

BILL. Pat Slanner's a thief.

JOHN. Thief?

BILL. A low down thief. Caught him stealin' out of me locker, t'night, me money. He might as well steal the blood out of me veins. Pat Slanner. I thought he was a friend of mine. I was beginnin' to like him.

JOHN. I wouldn't have thought that of Pat.

BILL. That's the way it goes. When ye want somebody to be your friend, an' think he's all right . . . ye find him out.

JOHN. What would you think of a man you were beginning to know for the first time, a man who would steal the very blood out of your veins?

BILL. [*Rising with clinched fists.*] I think I might

choke him with these hands! [*He stares at* JOHN.] Why?

JOHN. I was wondering . . .

BILL. [*Sitting and facing him across the table.*] I know ye for the first time. I want ye out of the plant . . . no place for you. [*Then, as if speaking with confidence.*] Get ye another job . . . in the mines . . . it's nice an' cool down there . . . an' safer. I won't have ye like Pat Slanner! [*He leans upon the table and stares at him.*]

JOHN. Am I deaf? Do you have to shout and stare at me?

BILL. Hear me? So ye want to be a man? Fine start ye be makin'. Know what I'm drivin' at?

JOHN. Yes. . . . I think I do? I'll be friendly . . . I'll get along.

BILL. [*Rises and continues to look at him.*] Ye will, eh?

JOHN. Oh, for God sakes, don't stand there like an ape!

BILL. D'ye want to get along? D'ye want to be square? [*There is a long pause.* BILL *turns his eyes from* JOHN *to look at the top of the cabinet, moves over to the left a few steps, then turns quickly and faces* JOHN.] What d'ye jump for?

JOHN. I'm nervous.

BILL. [*After a pause, seeming to weigh an idea that is developing in his mind.*] Johnny, let's me an' you be square?

JOHN. All right.

BILL. Then, all right. [*He pulls a chair up to the cabinet and steps upon it.*]

JOHN. What are you going to do?

BILL. Why, this is somethin' to celebrate. [*He steps upon the ledge of the cabinet.*] Ye wouldn't care if I took a little drink, so I kin sleep.

JOHN. Not tonight. . . . Please don't drink any more.

BILL. I'm terrible nervous. I've got a little whiskey hid 'way in a bottle. I allus take a hooker before bedtime.

JOHN. No. You said you were going to stop.

BILL. On'y one—to celebrate the 'casion. [*He smiles down at him cynically.*]

JOHN. Please don't. Get down now.

BILL. [*Studying* JOHN.] All right. I'll not touch it. But I jus' git the bottle an' pour it out in the sink. [*He starts to reach over the top of the cabinet;* JOHN *tries to stop him.*]

JOHN. Leave the stuff alone. Get down.

BILL. Why d'ye act so?

JOHN. Come away and let it alone.

BILL. What's the matter? [*He reaches his hand over the top of the cabinet and takes the bottle from its place.* JOHN *turns away.*] Empty? Empty? [*Getting down.*] I say, Johnny, it's empty! Do ye hear me? Where's the whiskey?

JOHN. [*Miserably.*] I drank it.

BILL. Ye steal my whiskey?

JOHN. I couldn't help it.

BILL. [*Moves across to him holding the bottle before him.*] So ye preach to me an' steal my whiskey? You, like Pat Slanner. [*He reaches for* JOHN *and takes him by the throat.*] Ye sneak. Preach an' call me a drunkard, will ye? I never stole a drink in me life.

JOHN. Let me go. I couldn't help it! [*Tries to work loose.* BILL *drags him across to the table. He places the empty bottle on the table and takes a fresh pint from his pocket.*]

BILL. Why don't ye ask for it like a man? [JOHN *drops to his knees gasping.*] I'll learn ye. Ye think I don't know why ye come home early every night. [*He uncorks the bottle with his teeth.*] I'll give ye a man's drink. [*Forces him to drink.*] Drink, ye sneak. [MRS.

RODNEY *appears in the door on the right and stands looking on.*] Ye preach to me an' steal my whiskey. [*He throws him aside and places the bottle on the table.*] Now, ye can git out!

JOHN. [*Finally getting to his feet.*] I hate you, drunkard. What have I to thank you for? You gave me life when you were drunk, a weak body and a whiskey soaked brain. I hope the powder plant blows sky-high and you into a million pieces, you old devil!

MRS. RODNEY. Johnny!

BILL. [*Raising his fist over his head and going for him.*] You! [*He grunts and speaks inarticulately in his rage.*]

MRS. RODNEY. [*Quietly.*] Billy! [BILL *turns to see her in the door-way, then he looks again at* JOHN, *his fist unclinching. He staggers over to the mirror and thrusts his face before the glass, turns and stares at them.* JOHN *sits down at the table.* BILL *takes the bottle of whiskey and thrusts it into his pocket, goes to the door and looks back.* JOHN *takes the picture from the book, looks at it, tears it into pieces. He leans forward burying his face in his arms on the table.* BILL *opens the door and turns to go, but turns once more to look back as* MRS. RODNEY *shakes her head and speaks.*] Don't come back. [*He goes out slowly and the wind howls as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

FORTUNE'S HIRED MAN

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CHARACTERS

MARTHA FORTUNE
ESSIE, *a hired girl*
JOE, *a negro hired man*
DAN PALLUM
MILT FORTUNE
TIME: *The present*

FORTUNE'S HIRED MAN

SCENE—*The back porch of the Fortune farm house in the coal fields of southern Illinois. A small porch about eight feet long and five feet deep with the kitchen door in the center of the rear wall. The side of the house on the right contains a window with a broken pane held intact by a strip of newspaper neatly glued to the glass. The house is badly in need of paint. It is neither completely run-down nor dilapidated, but its condition is at once noticeable. On the porch itself is a small table covered with checkered oilcloth, pushed back in the corner on the right. On the left, rear, is a washstand. There is a pitcher and two wash pans, one with a red string tied to it. On the wall is a roller towel.*

Several feet to the left of the porch, and a few feet forward, the front of a tool house may be seen. The door is closed and locked with a padlock. A mulberry tree stands near the house, trailing its branches over the roof of the porch. The space between the toolhouse and the porch gives view to the farm, which is no more than a weed patch fading into the landscape under the beating sun of the smoky Indian summer.

There is not a sound anywhere—nothing, save for the distant chugging of a tractor from a neighboring farm;

and the light that comes from the setting sun adds a touch of red to the house and the field. It is about seven o'clock on one of those sultry days in summer when men stagger under the heat, and every inanimate thing suggests a corresponding state of absolute exhaustion. The intense heat of the day clings restlessly to the parched ground, still dancing in the fields after the long shadows have begun to stretch their fingers over the rolling hills. Out of the stillness rises the low murmuring of bees, singing a wailing protest against the oppressive enervation of the day.

MARTHA FORTUNE *enters from the left with a pan of cowpeas, pauses and looks into the field. Then she comes upon the porch and sits down in an old rocker, wiping the perspiration from her face with her sleeve. She is an old, gray woman of sixty, dressed in a faded calico dress, apron and bonnet. Her expression is stolid but wilful. She glances over her shoulder at the kitchen door and calls "*ESSIE*? Oh,* ESSIE*?" and begins to shell the peas.*

The kitchen door opens and ESSIE *comes out. She is a barefoot, freckled-faced expressionless girl of eighteen, wearing a ragged dress much too short for her. She has the appearance of one who is faded and old. She stands wiping her face and hands on her apron.*

ESSIE. Ma'am.

[*In a flat tone, snapping the peas without looking up.*]

Better call Joe. If he stays in the field too long, he might miss his train.

ESSIE. Phew! Of all the days to be standin' over a red-hot stove cookin' fer a lazy coon what don't care no more for you than a yeller dog.

MRS. FORTUNE. Tell him to come on in. He's got the chores to do yet, an' I want he should get started before Milt gets in from the mine. I don't want trouble betwixt him an' Milt, bein' as it's Joe's last day. Get on with you.

ESSIE. What makes you think there's goin' to be trouble, Marthy?

MRS. FORTUNE. As like as not Joe'll get his back bowed, him actin' funny these last few days, mumblin' to hisself an' shying' about like a new-broke ho'se.

ESSIE. I allus said he wasn't right, ever since he come here. Who but a crazy nigger'd do the things he does? Last night I seen him puttin' a tin can on the fence an' knockin' it off with the sickle.

MRS. FORTUNE. [*After a pause—slowly turning to* ESSIE.] I wonder if he could be a little off? [*Then sharply.*] Don't matter. It's his last day.

ESSIE. [*Tapping her head with her finger and making a circular gesture with it in the air.*] He's plum loco,

he is. An' him that way, it wouldn't find me upset if he was to get his back bowed.

MRS. FORTUNE. Let Milt Fortune catch him loafin' round, an' he'll get a beatin' that he'll remember to his dyin' day. It nigh happened last payday, when Milt drawed money at the mine to pay him with. Then, 'cause he begged, Milt let him go. [*There is a pause.* JOE, *a tall, slightly stooped negro about thirty, dressed in overalls and black shirt and wearing a frayed straw hat, appears before the house on the right. He has a scythe over his shoulder and stands listening to the conversation.*]

ESSIE. Joe didn't never want to go. He only stays for you.

MRS. FORTUNE. We need Joe, scarce as white hands is. He's a good worker, when he wants to be.

ESSIE. I wouldn't be keepin' a crazy coon about, not if I was you. You ought to hear how the neighbors talk. Ever time I go to the store, somebody says to me "Bright Eyes, how's Milt Fortune's nigger?"

MRS. FORTUNE. We got to make the best of things, an' I want to keep Joe if Milt don't raise a fuss. Yell for him to come to the house. By the time supper's over, it'll be prayer-meetin' time.

ESSIE. [*Going to the edge of the porch on the left and yelling with her hands to her mouth.*] I don't see him

nowheres. Thet's it, sleepin' somewheres under a tree.

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Rising and going to the edge of the porch.*] Now that's what aggravates Milt, him payin' out his money an' Joe not workin'. Get into the field an' wake him up.

ESSIE. [*Going.*] Crazy fool nigger. [*She goes around the house, left.* MRS. FORTUNE *turns to sit down.* JOE *comes up to the porch with the scythe and sits down, right. He yawns drowsily.*]

MRS. FORTUNE. Well, Joe?

JOE. It sure am hot today.

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Indifferently.*] A little warm, yes. I just sent Essie to fetch you. Didn't 'spect you to come round this way. [*She rises and goes to the edge of the porch, left, calling.*] Essie? [*She motions for her to come back.*]

JOE. Heat!

MRS. FORTUNE. Now you ain't got no time to be lollin' about. Better get a move on you. There's the chores to be done yet.

JOE. Yas. [ESSIE *appears on the left and steps on to the porch.*]

ESSIE. You look natural! Well, how'd you get along in the field?

JOE [*Drowsily.*] 'Bout as well as could be 'spected.

MRS. FORTUNE. You know how much Milt told you to get out, the weeds?

JOE. Yas, ma'm. I knows hit. [*He begins to pout.*]

ESSIE. I thought you was goin' to get through the day without one of them poutin' spells. [*She taps her head and makes a gesture.*] Of course, Joe, you know you ain't got much sense.

JOE. [*Straightening up—chuckling.*] Dat's right, Miss Essie. Ah sho 'spects you is right. But ah ain't as crazy as you sometimes think. [*There is a pause.*]

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Looking at him curiously.*] Hadn't you better put up the scythe an' get the chores done? You don't want to miss your train, do you?

JOE. Ah don't zactly care 'bout goin', Miss Fortune.

MRS. FORTUNE. You'll have to go this time, Joe. Milt'd beat you with a club if you tried stayin' on him this time. He's plum out of patience with you. [*Seeing that* JOE *is moved by these words, she changes the subject—irrelevantly.*] Did you work hard today? Was the sickle sharp?

JOE. Sharp? Hit am sharp enough to cut a pig's head off.

ESSIE. [*With amused mockery.*] A pig's head off? A pig's head off? [*She taps her head.*]

JOE. Ah sharpen'd the sickle myself. Ah knows it am good an' sharp.

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Impatiently.*] An' after Milt told you to take it down to the mill? It's just such things as that, Joe, that puts Milt Fortune out of patience with you. You spent two hours on that blade this mornin', an' I seen you asleep, too, before noon.

JOE. [*Leaning forward—eagerly.*] You won't tell him?

MRS. FORTUNE. [*After a pause, giving him the benefit of the doubt.*] If you'll promise me one thing?

JOE. W'at?

MRS. FORTUNE. That you won't talk back to Milt Fortune when he comes in from the mine—hear?

JOE. [*Nodding.*] Yas'm. Ah don't want trouble with your husband, Miss Fortune. Him as what ain't in no good humor when he come out of the mine. [*He rises and stands staring at the ground.*]

MRS. FORTUNE. Better get that feedin' an' milkin' done, now. JOE *moves wearily over to the toolhouse on the left.*] Essie?

ESSIE. Ma'am.

MRS. FORTUNE. Get the milk bucket an' start him off. [*She stares for a moment off to the right.*] There's

Dan Pallun comin' in at the gate, an' I don't want him teasin' Joe. [ESSIE *goes into the kitchen.* JOE *takes a key from his sock, unlocks the toolhouse door and starts to put the scythe inside.*] Leave the sickle out, Joe. Dan's comin' over to borrow it.

JOE. [*Troubled—staring at her.*] The sickle?

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Impatiently.*] Did you hear me? Leave the sickle out for Dan. [JOE *stands fumbling the lock, not seeming to pay any attention to her.* ESSIE *comes out of the kitchen with the milk bucket.*]

ESSIE. [*Going over to* JOE.] Come on, now. Get a move on you. [JOE, *paying no attention to her, unlocks the door.* MRS. FORTUNE *looks on.* DAN PALLUM *appears on the right. He is a seedy, sandy-complexioned young man of twenty-five with an important air.* JOE, *having opened the door, turns and looks at* DAN.]

DAN. [*Briskly.*] Howdy, Folks?

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Quietly.*] Hello, Dan. [*She turns to* ESSIE *and motions for her to get* JOE *started to the barn.*]

ESSIE. Come on, Joe. [*She takes him by the arm; he resists.*]

DAN. [*Wiping his face with a bandana.*] Ain't this a hot one for you? I never work on such days. I'm not a nigger.

ESSIE. Joe, come on with me. [*He stares at* DAN.]

DAN. [*Looking at* JOE.] Well, how's the old black boy today?

JOE. [*Resentfully.*] All right.

DAN. [*Proudly.*] Say, Mrs. Fortune. I come by to borry the sickle. I got a few weedy corners I want to weed out after sundown, when it's cooler.

MRS. FORTUNE. All right, Dan. [*To* JOE.] Joe, give Dan the sickle.

JOE. Hit's broke.

DAN. That's all right, I'll fix it myself. Fetch her over here, an' I'll be on my way.

JOE. You kint fix it, an' you ain't goin' to have hit.

DAN. What? Say, I know more about tools in a minute than you'll ever know, you midnight nigger.

JOE. [*Leaving the tool-house door and taking a few steps toward him—quietly.*] Say that again an' ah'll knock you cold.

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Rising.*] Joe! What's got in your head?

ESSIE. [*Urging* JOE *to move on.*] Get along you. [*She turns to* DAN.] Don't be startin' a fuss with him.

DAN. [*In his proud manner.*] Now, listen here, little

one. Don't start bossin' me round yet. [*He pinches her chin playfully and she boots him in the seat of the pants.*] Cut that out, Essie!

ESSIE. Go on home.

DAN. [*In his coarse matter-of-fact bluntness.*] Well, do I take the sickle or not?

MRS. FORTUNE. Yes, but can't you come after it in the mornin'?

DAN. [*Grumblingly.*] An' lose an hour's work. I'd like it now.

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Resignedly.*] Dan Pallum, you're as stubborn as Milt Fortune ever was. I wonder that the two of you don't drive me mad. [*She steps down off the porch and goes to* JOE.] Joe, give Dan the sickle.

JOE. [*Puts the sickle inside and locks the door.*] He don't get the sickle.

DAN. I don't, eh? We'll see. [*He starts to the door and* JOE *steps before him.*] Get out of my way, you damn nigger!

JOE. [*Standing his ground—defiantly.*] You touch that door, an' ah floor you, white trash!

DAN. [*With mocking laughter.*] Listen at him! [*He shoves him aside and in a moment they become engaged in a scuffle. Finally* JOE *bends him to the ground and twists his arms behind him, the while he struggles*

with his own rage. MRS. FORTUNE *and* ESSIE *look on in wild astonishment.*]

MRS. FORTUNE. Stop that or I'll get the gun! [JOE *releases him.*] Joe, now you get to the barn this minute! Dan, get on. Come in the mornin', if you want the sickle.

DAN. [*Getting to his feet and laughing the matter off as a joke.*] Say, you play rough, black boy.

JOE. Don't you call me black boy. [*Goes for him.*]

MRS. FORTUNE. Joe! [JOE *stops short, looks at her and hangs his head.*]

DAN. Try this rough stuff up North an' you'll get a bullet through your head.

MRS. FORTUNE. Dan, do you hear, get on?

DAN. [*Facing* JOE.] You're a damn fool, leavin' the old man. You'll get yours up North, nigger. [JOE *springs at him, thinks better of it and turns away.* DAN *remains staring at him a moment, then takes the bucket from* ESSIE *and goes off left.* DAN *smiles apologetically at* MRS. FORTUNE *and saunters off to the right.*]

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Worried.*] That's a pretty come off. [*She stands looking off to the right.*] I don't know what to think of Dan, comin' over here an' startin' a racket this way. [*She turns and looks off to the left.*]

Why, that Joe's in a bad way. He's plum dangerous when he flares up.

ESSIE. Didn't I tell you somethin' was wrong in his upper roost?

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Speaking aloud to herself—thoughtfully.*] What if Milt Fortune had come home then? [*There is a pause. She turns to* ESSIE.] Essie, I'm afraid there'll be trouble, Milt comin' in from the mine tired out an' out of sorts. [*She remains for a moment, worried, then seems to dismiss the thought.*] Pull out Joe's table an' get his supper ready. Put on a white tablecloth.

ESSIE. [*Awed.*] White tablecloth?

MRS. FORTUNE. [*With a tone of command in her voice.*] Do what I tell you, Essie.

ESSIE. That there's just the whole trouble, you treatin' that coon like he was white people. [*Grumbling.*] A white tablecloth.

MRS. FORTUNE. Take a lesson from the bee—move about.

ESSIE. [*She starts inside.*] I'm movin'. [*Looks back at her.*] What'll your husband say? . . . It'll be plenty, I'm thinkin' . . . A white tablecloth . . . a white tablecloth. . . .

MRS. FORTUNE. Mind me. [ESSIE *goes inside and slams*

the door. MRS. FORTUNE *sits down and takes the pan of peas in her lap.*] I don't care what the neighbors say. A man's got feelin's, white or black. He takes the place of a white hand, an' I'll treat him white. [*She rocks and snaps the pea pods mechanically.*]

ESSIE. [*Entering with a white tablecloth and pulling the table out from the corner.*] Me settin' a table for that lunatic—white tablecloth. [*She spreads the cloth on the table.*]

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Occupied with thoughts of her own.*] Stop your mouthin' an' dry up, young un. [ESSIE *flies into the kitchen and slams the door. A moment later she comes out with a few dishes.*] An' don't be flyin' round here like a shotgun bride.

ESSIE. [*Setting the table.*] I don't have to stay here, I don't.

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Dryly.*] When do you want to leave?

ESSIE. I wasn't sayin' nothin'. [*She turns to go into the kitchen, then puts her head out once more to complain.*] I tell you he's crazy. Didn't I see him knockin' tin cans off the fence with the sickle. An' didn't I see him cuttin' the tops off the weeds this mornin'. Cuttin' the tops off of weeds . . . crazy coon. [*She disappears into the house.* MILT FORTUNE *appears between the toolhouse and the porch. He is a large bearded man dressed in miner's pit clothes, with cap and heavy,*

hobnail shoes. He steps on to the porch, puts down his dinner pail, glances around, sees the tablecloth.]

FORTUNE. [*Roughly.*] Whose eatin' at that table to-night?

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Quietly.*] Joe. Who else'd be eatin' there?

FORTUNE. Why all the dog?

MRS. FORTUNE. I'm goin' to show him there's one in the valley who don't draw the color line. With neighbors talkin' the way they do, it'll be a wonder the store don't stop our credit.

FORTUNE. [*With obstinate indifference.*] Oh, the devil. [*Faces her squarely.*] Wonder why you don't invite him in the dinin' room, the way you treat him like a visitin' preacher. I swear, I do believe you think as much of him as you ever did your own sons.

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Suddenly turning to him—intensely.*] That's a fine way to be sayin' things to me now, with both the boys killed in the mines. [*For the moment the thought of these memories seems too much for her, and she chokes up, almost crying.*] Quit your fussin' an' wash up.

FORTUNE. [*Going to the washstand and pouring water.*] That nigger been washin' in my pan? [*He washes his face.*] Let me catch him at it once. [*Dries his face and hands.*] What time did he get back from the mill?

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Without looking up.*] He sharpened the sickle hisself.

FORTUNE. [*Impatiently.*] The devil take him! An' after I told him to take it down to the mill? He ain't got a lick of sense. [ESSIE *appears at the door and stands listening.*]

MRS. FORTUNE. He saved you fifty cents, an' he's got more sense than you think.

FORTUNE. [*Still impatient—working himself up into a frenzy.*] I ain't a-payin' him to think. I'm a-payin' him to work. What's he been doin' all day?

MRS. FORTUNE. [*In a matter-of-fact tone.*] Workin'.

FORTUNE. [*Furiously.*] Rats! I come through the west field just now. There ain't enough weeds cut to fill a rat hole.

MRS. FORTUNE. It's been awful hot today.

FORTUNE [*Eager to differ with her.*] What's a little warm spell got to do with it? It makes no difference to him.

MRS. FORTUNE. Eat your supper an' forget it. [JOE *appears before the toolhouse with the milk bucket. He stands quietly, listening.*]

FORTUNE. [*Angrily.*] Forget nothin'! How you goin' to forget a damn black scoundrel who's took your money an' loafed on the job, the money I earned with

back-breaking work in the mine? [*There is a pause.* MRS. FORTUNE *sighs and gives up trying to reason with him.* FORTUNE *walks the floor.*] The damn loafer. [*Pauses and looks at her.*] Is he goin' tonight?

MRS. FORTUNE. He's goin'. You'll not get another hand, black or white, with all the help goin' North to work in the factories.

FORTUNE. [*Seeming to consider this for a moment, then dismissing the thought instantly.*] I don't care. Better nothin' than a loafer. [*Then as if he were speaking to himself.*] He better go. I'm through with him. Let me catch him round here after tonight an' I'll club him to death. Yes, that's what I'll do, beat him to death with a club!

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Rising impatiently.*] Oh, stop it! I've heard this long enough! You grumble an' grumble, an' now you come home an' want to beat the only one we got to do the work. [*She faces him, struggling for words to explain.*] Somebody's got to do the work, an' Joe's a good hand. [*There is a pause, during which she stares out at the field of weeds.*] Weeds! I'm sick of the place. For twenty year we've struggled on here, an' fit 'em like snakes. What have we got? Weeds! Look at the house. A shack that ain't fit for a pig-sty. And who else eats cowpeas twice a day the way we do? I'm sick of the whole thing, an' I'm tired of your grumblin', Milt Fortune! [*Bitterly.*] I'm tempted to

touch a match to it an' burn every stick of it to pieces! [*There is a pause. She stands facing him.*]

FORTUNE. [*Not knowing what to think of this sudden outburst of feeling.*] Martha!

MRS. FORTUNE. What's the use of savin' an' skimpin' an' tryin'? [*She almost breaks down. Finally she feels for her chair and sits.*]

FORTUNE. [*Appearing suddenly to have come face to face with his own bitter nature in his wife—with harsh sympathy.*] Leave off cryin' now. [*Comes to the chair and stands beside her.*] I didn't mean to hurt you, wife. [*He straightens up and stares before him, appearing to search his mind for some excuse to justify his difference.*] Poverty! Poverty! [*Grimly.*] How much longer? [*Then with rough, apologetic tenderness.*] It's that damn mine that's done it—that hell dungeon down there in the damp an' the cold. [*He remains staring blankly into space.*]

MRS. FORTUNE. [*After a pause—wearily.*] You was once a man with kindness in your heart.

FORTUNE. [*Impressed, seeming to be proud of this remark.*] But it seems so long ago. [*A pause.*] How can a man be human after leavin' the pit . . . worse than the pit o' hell.

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Nursing her own sorrows.*] I know it's hard.

FORTUNE. [*Quietly.*] Things 're goin' to be different. [*Then as if he wanted to say something to please her —awkwardly.*] Do you want to keep that Joe?

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Her manner dully indifferent.*] I don't care what you do now. Go in an' eat your supper.

FORTUNE. [*Slowly.*] I don't feel like I could eat a morsel. [*Looks over his shoulder at the door.* ESSIE *withdraws from the screen.*] Essie?

ESSIE. [*Her voice from within.*] What?

FORTUNE. [*Sitting on the edge of the porch and taking off his shoes.*] Heat me a kettle of water. These feet of mine ache awful.

ESSIE. It's heatin'.

FORTUNE. An' fetch me my mail order catalogue.

ESSIE. It's comin'.

FORTUNE. [*He rubs his feet.*] I'll soak these feet for a spell. [*He rises, takes his socks and shoes and goes to the door. He turns to look at his wife.*] Do you think, Martha, if we could get a tractor on time, that Joe'd try to do better?

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Showing a little interest.*] It don't seem much good to be goin' in debt an' plannin' things now. [*He looks at her for a moment, then starts to go*

inside. JOE, *who has been standing before the tool-house, comes up to the porch with the milk bucket.*]

JOE. Dat cow am as dry as a chip. She ain't give a pint o' milk tonight.

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Rising and taking the bucket.*] That's all right, Joe.

FORTUNE. [*Looking at Joe as if he were going to hire him for the first time.*] Sit down an' eat your supper. I'll be wantin' to talk with you after a bit. [*He goes inside.*]

MRS. FORTUNE. Better wash up, Joe. [*He goes to the washstand and looks at the two pans.*] The one with the red string on it. [JOE *pours water and washes, dries himself on his red bandana.* ESSIE *comes out with the food and places it on the table.*] Get yourself ready for prayer-meetin', Essie. Since you missed last time, you've had the devil in you.

ESSIE. That won't take me long, me with one other dress, an' it with a hole in it big as a June sun-flower. [*She goes inside.*]

JOE. [*Waiting patiently by the washstand.*] Where you want me to eat at, Miss Fortune?

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Indicating the table.*] At your table there.

JOE. [*Looking at the tablecloth, then sitting down.*]

Ah ain't never been treated like this before. I alwus e't off somewhere in a shed, on a boa'd.

MRS. FORTUNE. Eat all you want, now. [*She goes inside.* JOE *remains picking over his food, like an outcast man, friendless and alone. He stares at the wall. Finally* ESSIE *appears with the coffee pot.*]

ESSIE. Plenty cowpeas tonight, Joe.

JOE. Ah sees 'em.

ESSIE. An Tatters.

JOE. Yas'm.

ESSIE. An' cornbread.

JOE. Yas'm.

ESSIE. [*Seeing that he has not eaten.*] Yas'm? What's the matter with you? You ain't e't a bite, settin' out here starin' at the wall like a dead frog.

JOE. Ah ain't hungry, Miss Essie.

ESSIE. You won't get my cookin' ever' day in the year, I can tell you.

JOE. [*Lost in thought.*] Yas'm. [*There is a pause. She looks at him for a moment, her arms akimbo, then she clears the table and goes inside with the dishes. As she closes the door,* JOE *glances over his shoulder, lends an eager ear to be sure that she has gone into another part of the house. Then he gets up, withdraws a few*

steps from the table, judging the distance from his feet to table. Then, as if he were holding a scythe in his hands, he makes a quick, swinging movement over the top of the chair, pauses a moment, then withdraws to the toolhouse and goes inside. He takes down the scythe, draws a file from his pocket, and closes the door.]

FORTUNE *comes out on the porch with a mail-order catalogue in one hand and a kettle of hot water in the other. He gets his pan from the washstand and places it on the floor under the table, filling it with water. He sits down, puts his feet into the pan, places the catalogue on the table, fills his pipe and smokes peacefully. The toolhouse door opens, and* JOE *peeps out. The door closes.*

MRS. FORTUNE *comes out. She has a paper bag in one hand and a Bible in the other. She has changed dresses and wears a shawl around her shoulders.*]

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Looking around.*] Has Joe went yet?

FORTUNE. Not less he's went without his pay.

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Turning to the toolhouse—calling.*] Joe? [*There is no answer.*] Joe? [*Finally the door opens and* JOE *comes out, putting a battered suitcase outside the door. He wears a felt hat and a gray coat.*]

JOE. [*Coming up to the porch.*] Yas'm.

MRS. FORTUNE. [*Giving him the paper bag.*] Here's a

lunch for you. We must go now, to prayer-meetin'. [*Shakes hands with him.*] Good luck, Joe, an' God bless you.

JOE. [*Humbly.*] Thanks, Miss Fortune, thanks, thank you. [ESSIE *comes out.*]

ESSIE. Good-bye, Joe.

JOE. Good-bye, Miss Essie. [*He starts off to the left, leaving his suitcase.*]

FORTUNE. [*Turning and speaking roughly.*] What're you goin' off that way for? The railroad track is off that way. [*He points to the right.*]

JOE. [*Simply.*] Ah wus goin' out to the barn to tell the cow good-bye. [FORTUNE *chuckles.*]

FORTUNE. Don't forget to come back for your pay. [*To* MRS. FORTUNE.] Do you want to keep him?

MRS. FORTUNE. If you think you can get along with him. But in a few days, it will be the same, curses an' threats. [*She and* ESSIE *start to go, right.*] It's up to you. [*They go.*]

[FORTUNE *continues reading his catalogue.* JOE *appears in front of the toolhouse door, goes in quietly, comes out with the scythe. He has removed his coat and felt hat and stands in his overalls and straw hat. He comes up to the porch carefully, moves up behind* FORTUNE

and raises the scythe. He braces himself and draws back the scythe. At this moment his eyes catch sight of ESSIE *and* MRS. FORTUNE *going down the lane. He struggles with himself for a moment; the scythe becomes heavy in his hands. He breaks down, and the scythe drops to the floor with a metallic crash.* FORTUNE *springs to his feet, jerking the chair with him, and the two men confront each other with a wild stare.*]

FORTUNE. [*Fiercely.*] Thunder 'n' lightin'! What in hell fire's the matter with you?

JOE. [*Breaking down—pleadingly.*] Ah . . . Ah can't!

FORTUNE. Can't what?

JOE. Ah can't go. [*There is a pause during which* JOE *struggles with himself for words.*] Ah has decided, suh, to stay here an' cut them damn ol' weeds.

FORTUNE. [*Trying to piece together some logical conception of the man's decision.*] You wanted to go. Now what's the matter with you?

JOE. [*Begging.*] Let me stay! [*With strong feeling.*] Ah wants to stay! It is for Miss Essie an' Miss Fortune, Suh. They are kind. You see, Ah's ready for work.

FORTUNE. [*Seeming to understand how much this simple request means to him.*] So you want to stay?

JOE. Yas, suh. [*He hangs his head.*] Ah guess Ah'm plum crazy. You'll keep me, won't you? Ah'll work.

FORTUNE. [*For a moment unable to decide, then making up his mind—with a dry chuckle.*] All right. Put up the scythe an' call it a day. [JOE *nods kindly, moves over to the toolhouse and goes inside. He sits on the cot, resting his head between his hands.* FORTUNE *remains standing a moment, then sits down and continues looking at the catalogue as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

AFTERMATH

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CHARACTERS

GEORGE MOULTON
JANE MOULTON
JIM MOULTON
DAVE MOULTON
MARY ARBER
TIME: 1920

AFTERMATH

SCENE—*The sitting room of the Moulton farm house in the coal fields of southern Illinois. The room is of the plainest kind, furnished with the bare necessities of household comfort, having a suggestion of harshness, of ordered regularity and meticulous cleanliness. It is quite evident that a good housekeeper dwells here, though the personality of the room as a whole is dominated by a bleak aspect of want.*

The front door, open and showing a patched screen, is in the middle of the right wall. There is a window on either side. On the right, at the back, is a window through which streams the yellow-gray light of the October harvest moon. On the mantel is a large vase overflowing with goldenrods; a framed picture of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ child; and a bright-colored print bearing the Ten Commandments. On the wall immediately above the mantelpiece, and occupying a conspicuous portion of the space, is a large framed print of Rosa Bonheur's "The Horse Fair." Pinned to the wall are two newspaper clippings; one of a young woman in fashionable street dress; the other of a girl wearing a smart summer hat.

The left wall contains two doors; the one in the rear opening into another part of the house, while the one in front admits entrance to an upstairs bedroom. Along the wall between the two doors is an old style walnut bed. There is also a homemade walnut dresser. In the middle of the room is a table, obviously of clumsy home-made design. Heavy rockers are on either side. The table, on which stands an old fashioned Argand or Rochester lamp, is literally covered with mail-order catalogues and agricultural journals.

GEORGE MOULTON, *a hulking, powerfully built man of sixty, is sitting at his table with a catalogue on his lap. He is sound asleep, and his face wears the tired expression of the workingman exhausted from the day's toil. He is dressed in shabby work clothes and is in his stocking feet, with his heavy shoes on the floor by his side.* JANE MOULTON, *his wife, a stolid, gray woman of the same age, is sitting opposite him with her sewing basket on her lap. She is also sound asleep.*

It is a magnificent Autumn evening about ten o'clock. The time is 1920. The room is hushed to that kind of stillness which creeps into a farmhouse when only the old people are alone. The silence is broken by a measured step on the porch outside, a steady peck, peck, peck. A moment later some one rattles the screen door and says "Hey there, wake up." The fellow is heard to peck his way across the porch and disappear. The dog begins to bark obstreperously. MOULTON *and his wife awaken.*

MOULTON. [*Yawning.*] Well, I wonder what Towser could be barking at?

JANE. [*Blinking under the light.*] Dave an' Mary comin', I reckon. [*She glances at the clock.*] Good heavens, it's after ten!

MOULTON. [*Rubbing his eyes.*] I must of been sound asleep an' dreamin'. I'd swear I heard Jim come upon the porch a minute ago. Seems like he said, "Hey there, wake up," or somethin'.

JANE. [*Gathering up her sewing.*] I thought I heard somebody rattle the door. Thinkin' of Jim, I reckon. See who Towser's barkin' at.

MOULTON. [*Rising and going to the door on the right —stretching.*] That'll be enough of that, Towser. [*He opens the door and looks out.*] Barkin' his fool head off at the moon. What a night. [*The dog stops barking and growls.*] Cut it out, Towser!

JANE. Mary an' Dave comin', maybe.

MOULTON. Towser never barks at them two.

JANE. Then it's just like that lazy Jim to be slippin' round out there.

MOULTON. How long's he been away on this last lark?

JANE. More'n two months. He went agin to Chicago to see if the government people would get him a leg.

MOULTON. They kept him in the hospital, mebbe.

JANE. [*Nervously.*] I don't know. But I know what it is to have them back, two shells of men, with nothin' left in their hearts but bitter hate.

MOULTON. They was once good pals, Jim an' Dave.

JANE. That was before the war.

MOULTON. Keep your mind off it, Jane.

JANE. Don't I try to? [*The dog barks.*] See who that is slippin' round out there. If it's Dave an' Mary, tell 'em to come on in. She's got no business gaddin' about this time of night.

MOULTON. You don't expect young people who's to marry to go to bed at sundown, do you, Jane?

JANE. She's only a strip of a girl, an' not ready yet.

MOULTON. Let 'em run together if she wants to. She never got much out of life at home, her with her naggin' mother watchin' her like a hawk, an' her Paw gettin' killed in the mine so sudden. I'm glad we was able to take her in. What Mary needs is freedom—freedom to grow and make a fine woman.

JANE. Tell her to come in. [MOULTON *opens the door.*]

VOICE. Get down, Towser, you scoundrel!

MOULTON. It's Jim all right. I can tell that voice a mile. [*There is a pause. The pecking sound is heard on the*

porch. JANE *stands looking over his shoulder. Then they withdraw from the door and* JIM *comes in. He is a tall, thin, young man of twenty-three, sallow-skinned, unshaven, with a kind of insinuating grin, indicating a peculiar mental and moral twist. He stands with an effort on his peg leg, blinking under the light. Whenever he speaks, his voice suggests a crepitant cough, and his cynical face, now wearing an almost perpetual sneer, is downcast and evasive. He stares at his father and mother, removes his black slouch hat. A silence falls on the room.*]

JIM. Well, don't you know me?

MOULTON. Come in and sit down, Jim.

JIM. I cut across the field, from the railroad—whew!

JANE. You come home on that freight? [*He nods and grins.*]

MOULTON. [*Shaking hands with* JIM.] You look all right, I guess. [*Stands for a moment looking him over.*] But a bit puny.

JIM. I know how I look, Paw.

JANE. [*Who has been watching him with a worried look.*] Are the government people goin' to buy you a leg?

JIM. Don't talk government people to me. I want my

life back, that's what I want. [*He begins to cough, then pecks his way to a chair and sits down.*]

JANE. I'm sorry, Jim.

JIM. Cut it out. Can't I come around here without bein' pitied?

JANE. I wish you wouldn't talk that way.

JIM. [*Looking up.*] Where's Mary?

MOULTON. Her an' Dave went out to prayer-meetin' in that car of his'n. They ought to be home by now.

JIM. How's Mary?

JANE. Fine. Her and Dave want to get married.

JIM. [*Surprised, then indifferently.*] For God's sake.

MOULTON. Well, that won't kill 'em.

JIM. And how's Dave? [*Sarcastically.*] Did the government people buy him an arm yet?

MOULTON. Now, be careful what you say about his arm, Jim. He's got a temper, you know, an' he might crack a whipple-tree o'er your head. [*The dog barks.*]

JANE. I don't know what could be the matter with Towser tonight. Barkin' ever' time a leaf falls.

MOULTON. It's Mary. [MARY *comes in. She is a young*

girl, slight, red-headed, wearing a straw hat.] Well, Mary, where's Dave?

MARY. The car broke down, the old thing. [*She sees* JIM *and is taken by surprise.*]

JIM. Well, don't you know me?

MARY. You scared me.

JIM. My God, do I look like a ghost?

MARY. I didn't mean that. You said you wasn't never coming back. [*She crosses over to the bed on the right and sits down.*]

JANE. What's Dave doin'? He ain't hurt, is he?

MARY. That car . . . it broke down . . . run in the ditch . . . oh . . . I don't know. . . .

MOULTON. Where's he at?

MARY. At the head of the lane.

MOULTON. [*Sitting down and hurriedly drawing on his shoes.*] That car! I'll go down an' see if I can help him, before I get out the ponies. At the head of the lane, you say?

MARY. You can't miss him—you can hear him swearing.

MOULTON. [*Getting his hat and coat from the stairway door and taking a flashlight out of his pocket.*] That car. [*He crosses over to the door on the right.*]

If I had a copper ever' time I pulled him in, I could get my hair cut. [*He goes out.*]

JANE. [JANE *impatiently goes to the door, right, and looks out.*] Now Dave's got to do away with that car. One of you children will get hurt yet.

JIM. Huh. This is a fine time to be talking about getting hurt. Some guy ought to've thought of that before the war come along, to make the world safe for nice people to live in. [*He laughs sarcastically.*]

JANE. You've got to stop talkin' like that, Jim. I tell you, I can't stand that laugh.

JIM. Then don't make me laugh.

MARY. If I was a man, I'd went to the war, I would.

JIM. [*Laughing.*] An' all the Germans'd broke their necks jumpin' in the North sea.

JANE. Mary, you keep still. You don't know a thing about the war.

MARY. Maybe I don't, about the fighting. I know something about the soldiers, when they come back, though.

JANE. What do you know? You don't know a thing. Now keep still. [*She looks at her, as if to sympathize and at the same time reproach her childish innocence. She turns to* JIM.] You look hungry as a dog. I'll get you somethin' to eat. [*She goes out, rear left.*]

MARY. [*Rising and crying out discordantly.*] You said you would never come back!

JIM. [*In his matter-of-fact tone.*] No job, no bed. So I had to come back to this damn neck of the woods.

MARY. Why didn't you write when I sent you the money?

JIM. Just didn't get around to it.

MARY. [*Hardly able to control her feelings—facing him squarely.*] It was Dave's money. He was giving it to me to save, so I could go to dress-making school. [*He is untouched by this remark.*] Oh, Dave'll kill me! [*She goes to the mantel and stands with her back to him.*]

JIM. [*Still indifferent, but with a growing look of doubt.*] He'll get his money back, the hot-headed little fool.

MARY. You don't think of nobody but yourself!

JIM. [*Getting up and going to her.*] It's all right. I came back to stay. I'll make things right, Mary.

MARY. [*Throwing his arms off—defiantly.*] Don't touch me, you ghost! I won't marry you.

JIM. [*Surprised but rather pleased.*] Oh, you won't? You're not the one to choose.

MARY. I hate you. And when Dave finds out I sent you his money, he'll kill me . . . he'll kill you!

JIM. He's yellow. I've seen him in the trenches. Besides, what's he got to do with it anyway?

MARY. [*Impatiently turning from him, then suddenly facing him.*] Can't you understand anything? Dave loves me. I love him. He said he would go away for good if I didn't marry him. I couldn't think of lettin' your Paw do all the work. [*After a pause.*] You got to go yourself.

JIM. I'm not afraid of him, an' I'll not go. You belong to me. That's why I came back.

MARY. I don't love you.

JIM. [*After a pause.*] Quiet. Maw's comin'.
[*The door on the right, rear, opens and* JANE *comes in with a plate of food.* MARY *pretends to busy herself with the papers on the table.* JANE *looks at her, then at* JIM. *There is an embarrassing silence.*]

JANE. You're awful quiet, all of a sudden. [*She clears a place at the end of the table and puts down the food.*] Here's your supper. It's plenty, such as it is.

JIM. [*Sitting down.* Thanks. [MARY *moves over to the bed and sits down, glancing up from time to time.*]

JANE. [*With obvious concern.*] What did the government people say about your leg?

JIM. [*Bolting his supper.*] Them damn chair warmers . . .

JANE. [*Nervously.*] I'll not have you talkin' this way before Mary. [*There is a pause.*] Go on, what did they say?

JIM. Said it'd take time to look into matters. They got my name mixed up with some geek by the name of James Martin down in this neck of the woods.

JANE. I guess it takes time, with so many soldiers needin' attention.

JIM. [*Instinctively revolting against the idea—rising.*] Time? By God, I want a leg, so I can walk. [*He fights with himself a moment to restrain himself, finally sits down and starts to eat.*] Well, is Dave gettin' any satisfaction about his arm?

MARY. He's been writing to the government.

JANE. But he ain't had no word yet.

JIM. An' he won't till he's dead an' rotten. [*The dog barks restlessly.* JANE *goes to the door and looks out.*]

JANE. [*Turns to* JIM.] It's your Paw and Dave. Don't be sayin' nothin' to Dave that'll raise a racket.

[MOULTON *and* DAVE *can be heard talking outside. A moment later they enter.* DAVE, *another ex-soldier, dressed in work clothes, has an empty sleeve from which extends an iron hook by which he carries an automobile wheel. He is the shell of what was once a young man, healthy, radiant, strong. His cheek bones*

are prominent, his face is marked by scars and blotches; his eyes have a hard, determined stare—restless, searching, penetrating. He places the wheel in the corner by the fireplace and stands looking at it.]

MOULTON. Well, Dave, what're you going to do about that wheel, make the garage man pay for it?

DAVE. [*Seriously—still looking at the wheel.*] If he don't, I'll hound the life out of him till he does. It makes me sore for anybody to try to put anything over on me. [*He turns and sees* JIM.] Well, Marco Polo, what wind blew you back?

JIM. No wind, Army.

DAVE. Keep your mouth shut about my arm.

MOULTON. Now, boys!

JANE. Jim, you eat your supper.

JIM. [*Laughing to himself.*] Ha, ha.

DAVE. [*Mocking him—irritably.*] Haw, haw, haw. You sound like a crow full of corn.

MOULTON. You boys used to be the best of pals. [*He moves over to the fireplace and stands leaning against the mantel.*] Now you get on like a couple of mad wildcats.

JIM. He gets sore if I kid him.

[DAVE *ignores this remark for the moment, sits down*

and takes out his pipe. There is a long pause. MOULTON *and* JANE *watch* DAVE *fill and light his pipe with one hand. He sits for a moment, smoking quietly.*]

MOULTON. [*A great deal impressed on seeing* DAVE *fill and light his pipe. He shakes his head.*] This war business—it sure strikes home. I was glad to see you boys do what was right, goin' to the war . . . there's glory in it . . . but . . .

DAVE. [*His mind elsewhere.*] Can't be helped now, Paw.

JIM. [*Springing to his feet and walking about.*] Yeh? Go to war! Get blowed all to pieces. There's a hell of a lot of glory in it. Talk about glory to me. By God, I've been there. I want a leg.

DAVE. [*Still smoking dreamily and beginning to chuckle good-naturedly in spite of himself—quietly.*] Where'd you get that peg leg you're hopping around on?

JIM. [*At first staring at him with a threatening curse, then grinning ironically.*] I pawned my crutches for it, that's where I got it, in a pawn shop.

JANE. Don't talk about such things. It seems so awful. [*She looks for a moment at her two sons, then goes to the bed and sits beside* MARY.]

JIM. [*Staring at* DAVE—*mockingly.*] Well, General Pershing, where'd you get that hook you call an arm?

DAVE. [*Giving him a straight look and biting his lips. He smiles.*] Made it out of the family poker. I'd like to see 'em get the best of me.

MOULTON. Who started the war, anyhow?

DAVE. A guy named Willie, Willie Kaiser.

MOULTON. If I ever run across him, I'll wring his neck.

JIM. Don't worry. He's over in Holland somewhere, sittin' on his rump, takin' it easy, at his country home.

JANE. An' we're in our country home payin' for it.

JIM. [*Still walking about the room.*] Join the army, die for your country . . . there's glory in it. [*He shrugs his shoulders and sits down to eat again.*]

JANE. You oughtn't to talk like that about the government, Jim.

MARY. You might get yourself in jail, if you don't watch out.

JIM. Don't care if I do. I tried to break into the army hospital, but not havin' no pull, didn't have much luck.

DAVE. [*Apparently at peace with the world.*] Take your medicine, old top.

JIM. [*Pushing back his plate.*] I've took my medicine, now I want a leg.

DAVE. You still belly-aching about that leg? You'll get

a leg if I have to sell my car and buy it myself. Give us a rest. You act like you had your head cut off, or something.

JIM. [*Disgustedly.*] Oh, Hell.

JANE. Now, you'll have to stop talkin' that way. What kind of talk is it that Mary has to listen to, an' her a buddin' woman? [*She goes to the table and gathers up the empty dishes.*] You children can stay up awhile an' talk, if you want to. [*She turns to* DAVE.] But the mines work tomorrow, Dave, an' it's your early mornin'.

DAVE. All right. [*Turns to* JIM.] You want Paw to see about a place at the mine for you?

JIM. [*Indifferently.*] I'll look around in town first.

DAVE. You're always looking around. [*He goes to the right, and stands looking out, quietly smoking his pipe.*]

MOULTON. [*Who has been looking on all the while.*] Well, think it over, Jim. [*He straightens up, takes a couple of steps toward the door, right.*] I can see how you boys feel, comin' home after the war. Not much glory in it, I guess. But work must go on, a man's work. The world has got its troubles . . . there's sunshine . . . there's sorrow. Nobody knows why this should be. Make the best of it, boys, an' maybe things will be different someday. [*He yawns and stretches.*] I

know it's hard. I sometimes feel like an old pit mule myself.

JANE. [*Finally going out with the dishes.*] Good-night.

MOULTON. [*Limping over to the door, rear, left.*] Well, good-night, Dave. Good-night, Jim. [*He goes out.*]

DAVE. Good-night. [*After a pause.*] I hear that sermon every night. [*He heaves a sigh of relief.*]

JIM. [*Lighting a cigarette.*] I guess he'll start in on me soon, not that I give a damn. [*He puts his feet on the table.*] Well, what'd you been doin' the last couple of months?

DAVE. [*Puffing on his pipe.*] What time I ain't been working in the mine, I been trying to look after the farm. Take your feet off the table. [JIM *does so.*]

JIM. I don't see how you can stand this jerk-water country.

DAVE. A little racket and travel didn't turn my head. I was glad to get back home.

JIM. Besides bein' yellow, you was scared stiff.

DAVE. You bet I was scared stiff, and so were you scared stiff, and so were four million others scared stiff.

JIM. I could never stand this place myself.

DAVE. [*Becoming impatient with him.*] What'd you come back for?

JIM. No work. Ain't I got to stay somewhere?

DAVE. Why don't you want to go to work in the mines?

JIM. I ain't lost nothin' in them mines.

DAVE. [*Rising and bending over the table facing him.*] About time you got in focus, ain't it?

JIM. What d'you mean?

DAVE. We work here. Maw works, Paw works, and Mary works. I do my part. If you come back to stay, better make up your mind to work. I won't tell you a dozen times.

JIM. [*Resenting his dictatorial manner.*] Who are you to tell me what to do?

DAVE. If you stay, you work. Now get that.

JIM. [*Rising and facing him.*] I know you hate the sight of me, but it's fifty-fifty.

DAVE. And you know why. I've hated the ground you walk on ever since that night you took that girl in Bordeaux away from me. I swore then and there if you ever touched another thing that belonged to me, I'd kill you. [*He faces him with narrowing eyes.* MARY *watches them eagerly.*] Not that it hurt me so much, but the way you shot off your filthy mouth about her

in camp that night. [*He begins to tremble.*] I may have been a coward over there, but every night I prayed to God Almighty that the war wouldn't harden my heart and make me bitter. Now that the dang shootin' match is over, I hate you worse than I hate a rattler. [*His face becomes red with anger.*] Get this, now, there's one thing I can't stand, and that's you putting your filthy hands on something that belongs to me. [*There is a pause. They still face each other.*] If we've got to get on here, we'd best have that understanding. [*He moves back to the fireplace and stands smoking his pipe.* JIM *offering no reply, looks at* MARY, *who gets up and starts to the stairway door.*]

MARY. Good-night.

DAVE. Wait.

MARY. I'm going to bed.

DAVE. Ain't you forgot something, Mary? [*She returns to the bed and takes her hat.*] Not your hat. [*Finally it dawns upon her what he means, and she goes over to him and kisses him.*] Thanks.

MARY. Don't mention it.

DAVE. I won't, don't you. [*She goes upstairs.*]

JIM. She's got her nerve, kissin' people before company.

DAVE. [*Smiling dreamily.*] That's why the war didn't make me bitter. I've got her to live for.

JIM. A good girl, Mary.

DAVE. I never loved anything in my life like I love Mary. I do love her. And I guess I have something to live for. [*After a pause, considerably impressed with thoughts of the future.*] We'll be getting married before long.

JIM. Married?

DAVE. Sure. Why not? [*There is a pause. They face each other. Finally* DAVE *comes to the table and stands before* JIM.] That's settled. [*A pause.*] Now that we are alone once more, let's get down to business.

JIM. What business?

DAVE. [*Tapping on the table.*] The farm—work. We've got to have your help, or the farm goes. Paw can't stand the mine much longer, an' you've got to stay.

JIM. I don't think I could stand it here.

DAVE. You're going to stand it.

JIM. Say, who you bossin'?

DAVE. I'm telling you. It's time you got your eyes open.

JIM. My eyes are open, wider than you think. That's why I came back. Oh, I know you hate me on account of that night in Bordeaux.

DAVE. Remember that.

JIM. All right. We know how we stand. [*Rising.*] But my eyes are open. Are yours?

DAVE. [*Coming face to face with him.*] What're you driving at?

JIM. You'll find out soon enough. [*He moves over to the door on the right.*] But to give you a hint, there's somethin' in this house that belongs to me.

DAVE. Speak out.

JIM. You're too hot-headed. You'll wake up pretty damn quick. After you cool off, I'll tell you. [*They are standing facing each other.*]

DAVE. Why don't you tell me now?

JIM. Do I have to write it out on paper? [*He goes out.* DAVE *remains for a moment, racking his brains with thought. Footsteps are heard on the stairway and a moment later the door opens and* MARY *comes in.*]

MARY. Dave, I've got to tell you something.

DAVE. [*Staring at her, his face working.*] There's something between you two.

MARY. Jim, he came back, to marry me!

DAVE. What's he been to you?

MARY. [*Miserably.*] I belong to him.

DAVE. [*His face reddening with anger.*] You been

intimate with him? [*Trembling and taking her by the shoulders.*] You been his woman? Own up!

MARY. [*Miserably.*] Yes.

DAVE. [*Almost breaking under the realization that comes to him.*] Mary Arber—common.

MARY. Let me go, please. It wasn't all my fault. I swear to God it wasn't!

DAVE. Fine thing you are! [*He takes his hands off her and turns from her, walking the floor blinded by his anger. She goes to the bed and sits down.*] I break my back working for you, and you do this! The war, all the blood and tearing . . . after I kept myself clean . . . you been laying with that skunk! [*His rage becomes almost uncontrollable; he beats his head with his fist.*] God Almighty!

MARY. I didn't know what I was doing.

DAVE. Don't cry to me about it now. [*He drops to his knees before the dresser, pulls out an old battered suitcase, jerks open the drawers and throws his things into the suitcase—continues to cry out inarticulately.*] After I kept myself clean . . . and now . . . and now!

MARY. Please don't go. This is your home.

DAVE. I will go. I won't look at you again. [*He locks the suitcase, suddenly pauses in an attitude of thought, turns to her.*] I'm a little short. Where's my money?

MARY. I'll send it to you.

DAVE. [*Impatiently.*] Right now.

MARY. It's in the bank.

DAVE. You're lying. Give it to me.

MARY. I'll give it to you . . . later.

DAVE. My money, hear me?

MARY. I've not got it. Jim, he was down and out. I sent it to him.

DAVE. [*Breaking out in uncontrolled rage.*] My sweat money! To that whelp? Where's my rifle? [*He stumbles to the stairway door and gets the rifle from the landing.*] I'll fix him. [*She tries to stop him but he drags her across the floor.*]

MARY. Please! Please! Think of yourself! You don't want to kill anybody!

DAVE. [*Trembling with the rifle in his hands.*] I could turn this rifle on you!

MARY. Go ahead!

DAVE. [*Struggling against the rage that blinds him.*] After I worked for you, . . . loved you . . . kept myself clean!

MARY. Put up the gun . . . you don't know what

you're doing . . . you can't kill him . . . [*The door on the left opens and* JIM *comes in. His presence kindles anew* DAVE'S *rage and he levels the rifle on him.*]

JIM. [*Drawing back with a sudden start, then regaining his courage.*] Well, why don't you shoot, soldier? I thought you was a big bluff, you hot-headed little coward. Yellow! [*The gun grows heavy in* DAVE'S *hands and falls to the floor.*] I guess you've found out, now. Why don't you take *your* medicine?

DAVE. [*Miserably.*] I couldn't shoot a dog. [*He stares at him for a moment, seeming to gather up all his courage and strength, deliberately plans a blow and knocks* JIM *down with his fist.*] Now get up from there, you whelp, before I stomp your guts out! Get up! [JIM *tries to get to his feet, finally succeeds and stands resting his weight on a chair.*]

MARY. I guess I've got no right here. I'll get out myself. [*She goes to the stairway door.*]

DAVE. [*As if striking the blow had freed him from his cowardice, he resumes his quieter nature.*] Wait? Where would you go? What would you do?

MARY. I don't know . . . I don't care.

DAVE. Go on to bed. [*She looks at him, then goes reluctantly upstairs. There is a pause. He faces* JIM.] And I was fool enough to let her drive me away. I'll not go. My place is here.

JIM. [*Getting his hat and moving over to the door on the left.*] I think I'll be beatin' it myself.

DAVE. [*Suddenly taking him by the shoulder and whirling him around.*] You wait a minute. Not so long's I'm here you don't beat it. [JIM *jerks away from him protestingly.*] Hold on. You'll see if I'm yellow. [*They face each other with defiant looks.*] Maybe I didn't have guts enough to stand up and shoot men down, but I've got guts enough to run this farm.

JIM. [*Sardonically.*] Yeah? Well, run the damn thing then, I'm through.

DAVE. [*Obstructing* JIM'S *passage at the door.*] We'll see if you're through. You'll stay and you'll take orders from me. Now get this. One of us goes into the mine . . . the other looks after the farm. [*They face each other bitterly.*] Take your choice.

JIM. [*After a pause, during which he struggles for an answer—bitterly.*] By God, I'll not stay! Damn the farm! Damn the mines! And damn you, you yellow coward!

[DAVE *is on the point of springing on him furiously when* JIM *breaks down with a crepitant cough, gasping for breath and beating his fists against his chest violently.* DAVE *watches him, a look of terror in his eyes, and then withdraws a few steps in silence. Finally* JIM *goes to a chair and sits down, exhausted. There is a pause. The stairway door opens and* MARY *comes in.*

She carries a telescope valise and crosses to the door, right.]

DAVE. [*Hurriedly going to her.*] Come back here.

MARY. [*Turning upon him—angrily.*] I'd rot in the streets like a dog before I'd stay in this house another minute! [*Starts for the door.*]

DAVE. [*Commandingly.*] Wait! [*The intensity of his voice halts her.*] Don't you dare go out that door. [*He tries to take the valise.*]

MARY. [*Bitterly.*] Take your hands off me!

DAVE. [*Jerking the valise out of her hand.*] Listen to me, you little slut. Where would you go with winter coming on?

MARY. [*Bitterly.*] Winter? It'd be warmer than this house of hate!

JIM. [*Breathing with difficulty—weakly.*] Go upstairs, Mary.

MARY. I'll not go upstairs and I'll not stay in this house!

DAVE. Shut your lying mouth before I smack you into next week.

JIM. [*Painfully.*] Upstairs, Mary.

DAVE. [*Pulls her away from the door.*] Sit down, there on the bed. [*She faces him and then obeys.*] Talk about

leaving. I know what'd become of you. [*He stands over her.*]

MARY. [*Weakening.*] I guess I can leave if I want to. [DAVE *smiles ironically.*]

JIM. I'm going in the mornin', an' I'll take her with me.

DAVE. [*Quietly.*] What in, an ambulance? And what with, I'd like to know?

JIM. [*Trying to put a tone of strength in his voice.*] Oh, I'm not as bad off as you think.

DAVE. [*After a pause—looking at him.*] No, you're half dead, that's all. [*A silence falls on the room. He turns to* MARY.] Go upstairs and go to bed.

MARY. [*Unwillingly obeying him.*] If I didn't have people depending on me, I'd leave, I would. [*She goes upstairs with the valise. There is a long pause. Finally a door is banged to upstairs.* DAVE *stands looking at* JIM.]

DAVE. How many spells you had like that?

JIM. Two. Gas—I got it at the Marne.

DAVE. I didn't know you were that stove up. You don't look so bad.

JIM. [*His voice betraying his inward condition.*] I know how I look. But I guess I can make my own way.

DAVE. Don't be a fool. [*There is a pause.*] I wasn't trying to hound you into doing anything you can't do. I wanted you to understand that you can't bluff me any more. If I'd known you were so . . .

JIM. [*Protestingly.*] I'll be all right. You don't have to worry about me.

DAVE. [*After a pause, studying him.*] If I'd known what I know now, I guess I wouldn't have said what I did. I just can't stand to be run over, that's all. [*Still looking at him, he withdraws to the mantel and leans against the mantelpiece.*] You hounded me all through the war. [*He draws a deep breath.*] If you were all right, I'd tell you to beat it, now that you see I can't be bluffed. [*A pause.*] But there's Mary. She's yours, and you ought to be thinking of her.

JIM. I'll be leaving in a couple of days now. [*They look at each other and simultaneously each seems to realize the hopelessness of* JIM'S *condition.*]

DAVE. What did the government people tell you in Chicago?

JIM. [*Grinning ironically.*] They gave me six months.

DAVE. [*Staring at the floor.*] Six months. [*Looking up.*] Then they told you?

JIM. Yes. But I'll show 'em.

DAVE. Well, suppose they might be right?

JIM. I guess there's nothin' I can do about it.

DAVE. [*Staring at the floor.*] How things turn out rotten. [*Gloomily.*] I guess there's nothing to be done. [*He takes a couple of steps toward* JIM'S *chair.*] Do you remember how things were on the farm, before we went to France? [JIM *nods.*] Paw said we were . . . but that was three years ago. God, he don't know us.

JIM. That's what Paw used to say—Pals.

DAVE. I was hoping, somehow, we might be able to make the farm go, for his sake. [*He looks down at the floor.*] Well, what about Mary?

JIM. That's why I came back. I'll get a job in the city an' take care of her. When I get me a leg, an' get strong like I was, I'll . . . [*His face brightens for a moment, then he chokes up and begins to cough, grows faint and waves his hand.*]

DAVE. I wouldn't be planning a lot of things. I guess you've already done your work. At least you had the guts to fight. If all had been like me, we wouldn't won the war. You were never yellow.

JIM. [*Faintly.*] Mebbe.

DAVE. [*Awkwardly.*] How . . . how do you feel?

JIM. [*His face betraying his inward pain.*] Oh, I'm all right.

DAVE. Anything I can do?

JIM. No. [*He rises from his chair slowly, starts to move over to the bed, hesitates and stares at the floor.*] I guess I have . . . Or mebbe I will stay here a while. [*He moves to the bed and turns to* DAVE.] I'll pay you back the money. [*He sits down.*]

DAVE. You don't have to worry about that, now.

JIM. [*With difficulty.*] Say . . . [*He hesitates, searching his mind for words to express what he wants to say.*] . . . if them doctors was . . . well, say they was right for once?

DAVE. [*Having already anticipated his thought.*] Yes?

JIM. [*Still hesitating—groping for words.*] An' if I was to live . . . say . . . only six months. [*He continues with tremendous effort.*] I was wonderin' if you might do somethin' for me?

DAVE. Why, yes . . . what is it?

JIM. I oughtn't to ask you, I guess . . . but it's about Mary. Will you look after her? [*Having spoken these words, he seems relieved.*]

DAVE. We'll keep her here. [*He swallows with difficulty.*] She'll be all right. [*Looks down.*] But you'll come through.

JIM. [*After a pause.*] I know that. [*With a distant*

look in his eyes.] But in case I don't. I got a feelin' all them doctors might be right.

DAVE. You'll pull through. [*Perfunctorily.*] The war's over. Forget it.

JIM. [*Staring before him.*] War. [*He gives an ironical chuckle.*] Funny business, ain't it? [DAVE *nods with an ironical smile.*] Well, I guess I've been a damn fool. [DAVE *sits down on the bed beside him.*] You know, I just felt like a young colt, wanted to kick hell out of everything. That's funny, ain't it? I was never like that here at home. [DAVE, *motionless, bites his lips and stares at the floor.*]

DAVE. No, we got along fine.

JIM. Well, I guess you're right, the war's over, an' I'm goin' to come through. [*He turns to* DAVE, *starts to place his hand upon his shoulder, hesitates, finally does so.*] I'll take it all back. I'm the one who's been yellow.

DAVE. It's all right.

JIM. [*Offers* DAVE *his hand.*] I'm willin', Dave, for Paw's sake, an' for the farm, to try to get on. [DAVE *takes his hand.*] An' if you can just try to keep from hatin' my guts, let's be pals once more?

DAVE. [*Withdrawing his hand and blowing his nose on his handkerchief.*] I'm willing.

JIM. [*After a pause—irrelevantly.*] I'm dyin' for a

smoke. Got any Bull Durham? [DAVE *hands him tobacco.*]

DAVE. [*Glancing at the clock—yawning.*] It's nearly eleven. [*He stares before him a moment, then tries to take off his coat.* JIM *watches him, then slips the coat from his shoulder.*] Thanks. [JIM *lights his cigarette and smokes quietly.* DAVE *unbuttons his shirt, murmurs to himself in a hushed whisper.*] Six months. [*There is a pause.*] God, I feel rotten! [*The clock on the mantel chimes the hour of eleven and they begin to undress for bed as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS